ANC

THE saint DETECTIVE MAGAZINE

JAN.
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Edited by LESLIE CHARTERIS

The Fallen Idol
by GRAHAM GREENE

Judge Priest—Murder Witness
by IRVIN S. COBB

The Widow's Share
by WILLIAM MacHARG

Murder at Christmas
by CHRISTOPHER BUSH

The Appalling Politician
by LESLIE CHARTERIS

SWEET MUSIC AND MURDER
A NEW STORY by OCTAVUS ROY COHEN

SOME OLD, SOME NEW — THE FINEST IN MYSTERY FICTION

A KING-SIZE PUBLICATION

Those of you who have been reading us long enough may recall the first time I ever stepped down from the royal box on the cover, which happened once even before we became a monthly. The story which occasioned that epoch-making act of modesty was a new opus by Octavus Roy Cohen, which we considered to be a publishing event worthy of unprecedented fanfares.

It therefore seems rather natural that another brand-new story by Mr. Cohen which we have been lucky enough to snare should be given the same honor under our new policy of starring someone other than Charteris in every alternate issue. SWEET MUSIC AND MURDER is a title that we don't dare enlarge on for fear of spoiling your suspense, but we can safely mention that you'll like it.

One of the very greatest names in crime-suspense writing is that of Graham Greene, and we are particularly proud to have him in our pages this month for the first time. The butler and the housekeeper, in conventional detective stories, are so stereotyped as to be a stock joke; but in THE FALLEN IDOL Mr. Greene shows how he can handle even that hackneyed subject with the inspired originality that has forced even the stuffiest critics to rank his thrillers with the best literature of our time.

MURDER AT CHRISTMAS is our oblique salute to the season at which this number will hit the stands. The writer, Christopher Bush, is an Englishman, and therefore should be highly qualified to set the stage for a good old-fashioned Noel; but his detective, Ludovic Travers, is as up-to-date as they come.

Perhaps just a mite old-fashioned in flavor is Irvin S. Cobb's JUDGE PRIEST—MURDER WITNESS because there's something of the deep stillness of a star-mirroring lake at midnight about a murder that takes place south of the Mason and Dixon line right after the Civil War. But stir the dark waters as Cobb does, and you'll be caught up in a whirlpool of excitement.

And we have barely left room to mention THE WIDOW'S SHARE, a top-bracket William MacHarg story, co-starring that perceptively tough-fibered policeman O'Malley, and a widow quite as hateful as Mrs. Belloc-Lowndes' classical villainess Ivy.

The Saint and I are represented this month by an exercise in detection entitled THE APPALLING POLITICIAN, which we frankly admit is not new. But on looking it over before reprinting, I found hardly anything that I would change in it. Least of all my opinion of politicians.

Leslie Charteris

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THE saint DETECTIVE MAGAZINE

JAN., 1955
VOL. 3, No. 1

The Appalling Politician 4
by LESLIE CHARTERIS

Sweet Music and Murder 18
by OCTAVUS ROY COHEN

The Fallen Idol 30
by GRAHAM GREENE

Death on Little Cat's Feet 53
by MARGARET MANNERS

The Widow's Share 68
by WILLIAM MacHARG

Murder at Christmas 75
by CHRISTOPHER BUSH

Judge Priest—Murder Witness 87
by IRVIN S. COBB

Sign of the Seven 106
by JOHN HUNTER

I Came to Kill 121
by IRVING E. COX, JR.

A Pair of Scissors 147
by GEOFFREY NORTH

Mr. Tuttle Takes a Trip 158
by EDWIN BAIRD

H. L. Herbert
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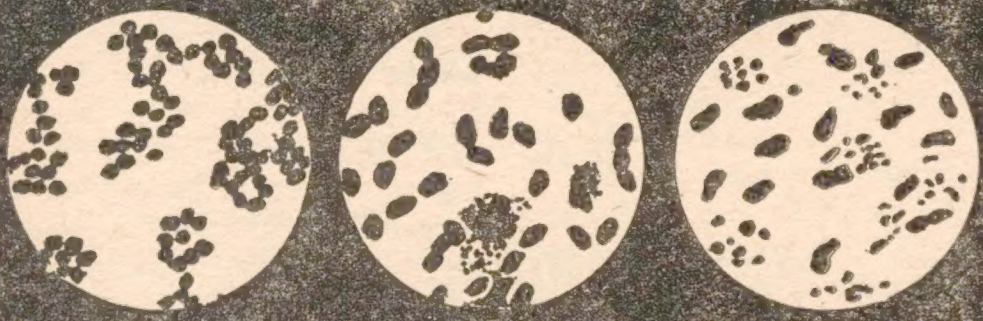

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DOUBLE MONEY BACK GUARANTEE

the appalling politician

by . . . Leslie Charteris

Not even Scotland Yard could unravel a crime so ingeniously embroidered. But Templar looked for the odd stitch—and found it.

THE FROG-LIKE voice of Sir Joseph Whipplethwaite boomed. He was speaking from the annual dinner of the British Badminton Society. "Badminton is an excellent means of acquiring and retaining that fitness of body which is so necessary to all of us in these strenuous times. We politicians have to keep fit, the same as everyone else. And many of us—as I do myself—retain that fitness by playing badminton.

"Badminton," he boomed, "is a game which pre-eminently requires physical fitness—a thing which we politicians also require. I myself could scarcely be expected to carry out my work at the Ministry of International Trade if I were not physically fit. And badminton is the game by which I keep myself fit to carry out my duties as a politician. Of course I shall never play as well as you people do; but we politicians can only try to do our best in the intervals between our other duties."

There was a static hum.

"Badminton," boomed the frog-like voice tirelessly, "is a game which makes you fit and

THE SAINT OUTWITS A THIEF IN AN AFFAIR BRIGHTLY FAMOUS FROM THE ROGUISH DAYS OF HIS EARLY LONDON TRIUMPHS

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From THE BRIGHT BUCCANEER. Published by Doubleday and Company, Inc.

keeps you fit; and we politicians—"

Simon Templar groaned aloud, and hurled himself at the radio somewhat hysterically. At odd times during the past year he had accidentally switched on to Sir Joseph Whipplethwaite speaking at the annual dinners of the North British Lacrosse League, the British Bowling Association, the Southern Chess Congress, the International Ice Skating Association, the Royal Toxophilite Society, and the British Squash Racquets Association; and he could have recited Sir Joseph Whipplethwaite's speech from memory, with all its infinite variations.

In that mellow oak-beamed country pub, where he had gone to spend a restful week-end, the reminder of that appalling politician was more than he could bear.

"It's positively incredible," he muttered to himself, returning limply to his beer. "I'll swear that if you put that into a story as an illustration of the depths of imbecility that can be reached by a man who's considered fit to govern this purblind country, you'd simply raise a shriek of derisive laughter. And yet you've heard it with your own ears—half a dozen times. You've heard him playing every game under the sun in his after-dinner speeches, and mixing it fifty-fifty with his godlike status as a politician. And that — that — that blathering oaf is a member of His Majesty's Cabinet and one of the men on whom the British Empire's fate depends. O God, O Montreal!"

Words failed him, and he buried his face wrathfully in his tankard.

But he was not destined to forget Sir Joseph Whipplethwaite that week-end or ever again; for early on the Monday morning a portly man with a round red face and an unrepentant bowler hat walked into the hotel, and Simon recognized him with some astonishment.

"Claud Eustace himself, by the Great White Spat of Professor Clarence Skinner!" he cried. "What brings my little ray of sunshine here?"

Chief Inspector Claud Eustace Teal looked at him suspiciously. "I might ask the same question."

"I'm recuperating," said the Saint blandly, "from many months of honest toil. There are times when I have to get away from London just to forget what gas fumes and soot smell like. Come and have a drink."

Teal handed his bag to the boots and chewed on his gum continuously.

"What I'm wanting just now is some breakfast. I've been on the go since five o'clock this morning without anything to eat."

"That suits me just as well,"

murmured the Saint, taking the detective's arm and steering him towards the dining-room. "I see you're staying. Has some sinister local confectioner been selling candy at illegal hours?"

They sat down in the deserted room, and Teal ordered himself a large plate of porridge. Then his sleepily cherubic blue eyes gazed at the Saint again, not so suspiciously as before, but rather regretfully.

"There are times when I wish you were an honest man, Saint," Teal said.

Simon raised his eyebrows a fraction. "There's something on your mind, Claud," he said. "May I know it?"

Mr. Teal pondered while his porridge was set before him, and dug a spoon into it thoughtfully. "Have you heard of Sir Joseph Whipplethwaite?"

Simon stared at him; and then he covered his eyes. "Have I not!" he articulated tremulously. He flung out a hand. " 'Badminton,' " he boomed, " 'is a game that has made we politicians what we are. Without badminton, we politicians—' "

"I see you have heard of him. Did you know he lived near here?"

Simon shook his head. He knew that Sir Joseph Whipplethwaite had acquired the recently-created portfolio of the Minister of International Trade, and had gathered from broadcast utterances that Sir Joseph considered Whipplethwaite an ideal man for the job, but he had not felt moved to investigate the matter further. His energetic life was far too full to allow him time to trace the career of every pinhead who exercised his jaw in the Houses of Parliament at the long-suffering taxpayer's expense.

"His house is only about a mile away—a big modern place with four or five acres of garden. And whatever you like to think about him yourself, the fact remains that he has fairly important work to do. Things go through his office that it's sometimes important to keep absolutely secret until the proper time comes to publish them."

Simon Templar had never been called slow. "Good Lord, Teal—is this a stolen treaty business?"

The detective nodded slowly. "That sounds a little sensational, but it's about the truth of it. The draft of our commercial agreement with the Argentine is going before the House tomorrow, and Whipplethwaite brought it down here on Saturday night late to work on it—he has the pleasure of introducing it for the Government. I don't know much about it myself, except that it's to do with tariffs, and some people could make a lot of money out of knowing the text of it in advance."

"And it's been stolen?"

"On Sunday afternoon."

Simon reached thoughtfully for his cigarette case. "Teal, why are you telling me this?"

"I don't really know," said the detective, looking at him soberly.

"When you walked in and found me here, I suppose you thought I was the man."

"No—I didn't think that. A thing like that is hardly in your line, is it?"

"It isn't. So why bring me in?"

"I don't really know," repeated the detective stubbornly, watching his empty porridge plate being replaced by one of bacon and eggs. "In fact, if you wanted to lose me my job you could go right out and sell the story to a newspaper. They'd pay you well for it."

The Saint tilted back his chair and blew a succession of smoke-rings towards the ceiling. Those very clear and challenging blue eyes rested almost lazily on the detective's somnolent pink half-moon of a face.

"I get you, Claud," he said seriously, "and for once the greatest criminal brain of this generation shall be at the disposal of the Law. Shoot me the whole works."

"I can do more than that," said Teal, with a certain relief. "I'll show you the scene presently. Whipplethwaite's gone to London for a conference with the Prime Minister."

The detective finished his breakfast, and refused a cigarette. After a few minutes they set out to walk to Whipplethwaite's house, where Teal had already spent several hours of fruitless searching for clues after a special police car had brought him down from London.

Teal, having given his outline of the barest facts, had become taciturn, and Simon made no attempt to force the pace. The Saint appreciated the compliment of the detective's confidence—although perhaps it was only one of many occasions on which those two epic antagonists had been silent in a momentary recognition of the impossible friendship that might have been just as epic if their destinies had lain in different paths. Those were the brief interludes when a truce was possible between them; and the hint of a sigh in Teal's silent ruminations might have been taken to indicate that he wished the truce could have been extended indefinitely.

In the same silence they turned in between the somewhat pompous concrete gate-pillars that gave entrance to the grounds of Sir Joseph Whipplethwaite's country seat. From there, a gravelled carriage drive led them in a semicircular curve through a rough, densely-grown plantation and brought them rather suddenly into sight of the house, which was invisible from the

road. A uniformed local constable was patrolling in front of the door: he saluted as he saw Teal, and looked at the Saint inquiringly.

Teal, however, was uncommunicative. He stood aside for the Saint to pass, and ushered him personally through the front door —a performance which, from the village constable's point of view, was sufficient introduction to one who could scarcely have been less than an Assistant Commissioner.

The house was not only modern, as Teal had described it—it was almost prophetic. From the outside, it looked at first glance like the result of some close in-breeding between an aquarium, a wedding cake, and a super cinema. It was large, white and square, with enormous areas of window and erratic balconies which looked as if they had been transferred bodily from the facade of an Atlantic liner. Inside, it was remarkably light and airy, with a certain ascetic barrenness of furnishing that made it seem too studiously sanitary to be comfortable, like a hospital ward.

Teal led the way down a long wide white hall, and opened a door at the end. Simon found himself in a room that needed no introduction as Sir Joseph's study. Every wall had long book-shelves let into its depth in the modern style, and there was a glass-topped desk with a steel-framed chair behind it; the upper reaches of the walls were plastered with an assortment of racquets, bats, skis, skates, and illuminated addresses that looked oddly incongruous.

"Is this architecture Joseph's idea?" asked the Saint.

"I think it's his wife's," said Teal. "She's very progressive."

It certainly looked like a place in which any self-respecting mystery should have died of exhaustion looking for a suitable place to happen. The safe in which the treaty had reposed was the one touch about it that showed any trace of fantasy, for it was sunk in flush with the wall and covered by a mirror, which, when it was opened, proved to be the door of the safe itself, and the keyhole was concealed in a decorative scroll of white metal worked into the frame of the glass which slid aside in cunningly-fashioned grooves to disclose it.

Teal demonstrated its working; and the Saint was interested.

"The burglars don't seem to have damaged it much," he remarked, and Teal gave him a glance that seemed curiously lethargic.

"They haven't damaged it at all," he said. "If you go over it with a magnifying glass you won't find a trace of its having been tampered with."

"How many keys?"

"Two. Whipplethwaite wears one on his watch-chain, and the

other is at his bank in London."

For the first time that day two thin hair-lines of puzzlement cut vertically down between the Saint's level brows. They were the only outward signs of a wild idea, an intuition too ludicrous even to hint at, that flickered through his mind at the tone of the detective's voice.

"Whipplethwaite went to church on Sunday morning," said Teal, with an expressionless face, "and worked over the treaty when he came back. He took it to lunch with him; and then he locked it up in the safe and went upstairs to his room to rest. He was rather taken up with the importance of secrecy, and he had demanded two guards from the local police. One of them was at the front door, where we came in. The other was outside here."

Teal walked towards the tall windows which filled nearly the whole of one wall of the room. Right in the center of these windows, on the stone-flagged terrace outside, the back of a seated man loomed against the light like a statuette in a glass case.

Simon had noticed him as soon as they entered the room: he appeared to be painting a scene of the landscape, and as they went through the windows and came out behind him Simon observed that the canvas on his easel was covered with brightly-colored daubs of paint in various abstruse geometrical shapes. He looked up at the sound of their footsteps, gave the Saint a casual nod, and bowed politely to the detective.

"Well, sir," he said, with a trace of mockery, "how are the investigations going?"

"We're doing the best we can," said Teal vaguely, and turned to Simon. "This is Mr. Spencer Vallance, who was painting exactly where you see him now when the robbery took place. Down there"—he pointed to a grass tennis-court which was cut bodily, like a great step, out of the fairly steep slope below them —"those same four people you see were playing. They're finalists in the South of England Junior Championships, and they're staying here as Whipplethwaite's guests for a week.

"The other constable on guard was supposed to be patrolling the back of the house—we're at the back now—and at the time when the burglary was committed he was about three-quarters of the way down this slope, with his back to the house, watching the game. In fact, the scene you see is almost exactly the same as it was at half-past three yesterday afternoon."

Simon nodded, and glanced again at Mr. Vallance, who had resumed his interrupted task of painting a neat blue border around a green isosceles triangle on a short brown stalk that was presumably intended to represent

a poplar in the foreground. The Art of Mr. Spencer Vallance was so perfectly appropriate to his background that it gave one a sense of shock. One felt that such a preposterous aptness outraged one's canons of that human inconsistency which we have come to accept as normal. It was like seeing a doorman in Arab costume outside a restaurant called "The Oasis," and discovering that he really was a genuine Arab. Vallance's picture was exactly like the house behind it: scientific, hygienic, and quite inhuman.

Simon spent a few seconds trying to co-ordinate the masses of color on the canvas with the scene before his eyes, which was particularly human and charming. To left and right of him strips of untouched plantation which were probably continuations of the spinney through which they had approached the house flanked the grounds right down beyond the tennis-court to the banks of a stream; while beyond the stream the land rose again up a long curve of hill crowned with a dark sprawl of woods.

"There are two poplars there, Mr. Vallance," Simon ventured to point out, when he had got his bearings on the picture; and the artist turned to him with an exasperated glare.

"My dear sir, what people like you want isn't an artist—it's a photographer. There are millions of blades of grass on that lawn, and you'd like me to draw every one of them. What I paint," said Spencer Vallance magnificently, "is the Impression of Poplar. The Soul of all Poplars is expressed in this picture, if you had the eyes to see it."

Mr. Vallance himself was the very antithesis of his art, being a small straggly man with straggly hair and a thin straggly beard. His clothes hung about him shapelessly; but his scrawny frame was obviously capable of so much superb indignation under criticism that Simon thought it best to accept the rebuke in all humility. And then Chief Inspector Teal took the Saint's arm and urged him firmly down the slope away from temptation.

"I'd better tell you what happened from our point of view," said the detective. "At twenty minutes to four the constable who was out here turned around and started to walk back towards the house. He had been watching the tennis for about a quarter of an hour. You might remember that all this time both the back and the front of the house had been covered, and nothing larger than a field mouse could have come through the plantation at the sides without making a noise that would certainly have attracted attention.

"The constable noticed that Vallance was not at his easel,

and the windows of Whipplethwaite's study behind were open—he couldn't remember if they had been open before. Of course, he thought nothing of that. I don't think I mentioned that Vallance is also staying here as a guest. Then, just as the constable reached the top of the slope, Vallance came staggering out of the study, holding his head and bellowing that he'd been sandbagged. He was working at his painting, it appeared, when he was hit on the head from behind and stunned; and he remembered nothing more until he woke up on the floor of the study.

"The constable found a sandbag lying on the terrace just behind Vallance's stool. He went into the study and found the safe wide open. The theory, of course, would be that the robber dragged Valance inside so that his body would not attract attention if the constable looked around."

Teal's voice was as detached and expressionless as if he had been making his statement in court. But once again that uncanny premonition flashed through the Saint's mind, rising ridiculously from that odd-sounding subjunctive in the detective's last sentence. Simon lighted a cigarette.

"I gather that Vallance is Lady Whipplethwaite's guest," he said presently.

Teal was only slightly surprised. "That is correct. How did you know?"

"His art fits in too perfectly with the house—and you said she was very progressive. I suppose he's been investigated?"

"This is Lady Whipplethwaite's statement," he said, taking out a notebook. "I'll read it to you.

" 'I first met Mr. Vallance in Brisbane fifteen years ago. He fell in love with me and wanted to marry me, but I refused him. For five years after that he continued to pester me, although I did my best to get rid of him. When I became engaged to Sir Joseph he was insanely jealous. There was never anything between us that could have given him the slightest grounds for imagining that he had a claim on me. For a few years after I was married he continued to write and implore me to leave Sir Joseph and run away with him, but I did not answer his letters.

" 'Six months ago he wrote to me again in London, apologizing humbly for the past and begging me to forgive him and meet him again, as he said he was completely cured of his absurd infatuation. I met him with my husband's consent, and he told me that he had been studying art in Paris and was getting quite a name among the Moderns. I liked his pictures, and when he begged me to let him paint me a picture of our house

to give me I asked him down to stay, although Sir Joseph was very much against it. Sir Joseph has never liked him. They have had several heated arguments while he has been staying with us.' "

Teal closed the notebook and put it away. "As soon as the theft was discovered," he said, "Sir Joseph wanted me to arrest Vallance at once, and I had a job to make him see that we couldn't possibly do that without any evidence."

They had reached a rustic seat at the end of the tennis-court, Teal rested his weight on it gingerly, and produced a fresh packet of chewing gum.

"Our problem," he said, gazing intently at the tennis players, "is to find out how the man who opened the safe got in here—and got out again."

Simon nodded quietly. "The tennis players would hardly make any difference," he remarked. "They'd be so intent on their game that they wouldn't notice anything else."

"And yet," said Teal, "the man who did it had to pass the constable in front or the constable at the back—and either of them should have seen him."

"It sounds impossible," said the Saint; and the man beside him put a slip of gum in his mouth and masticated stolidly.

"It does," Teal said, without moving a muscle.

At that moment the fantastic idea that had been creeping round the Saint's mind sprang into incredulous life. "Good God! Teal—you don't mean—"

"I don't mean anything," said Teal in the same toneless voice. "I can't possibly tell you any more than I've told you already. If I mentioned that Whipplethwaite was badly hit in the Doncaster Steel Company's crash three months ago—that a Cabinet Minister's salary may be a large one, but you need a lot more than that to keep up the style that the Whipplethwaites like to live in—I should only be mentioning things that have nothing to do with the case. If I said that the man who could open that safe without damaging it in any way would be a miracle worker, I'd only be theorizing."

Simon's cigarette had gone out, but he did not notice it.

"And I suppose," he said, in a slightly strained voice—"just taking an entirely mythical case—I suppose that if the details of that treaty got about, the Powers would know that there'd been a leakage? I mean, if there were only one man through whom the leakage could have occurred, he'd have to cover himself by staging some set of circumstances that would account for it without hurting his reputation?"

"I suppose so," agreed Teal formally. "Unfortunately there's

no Third Degree in this country, and when you get into high places you have to walk very carefully. Sometimes we're set almost impossible tasks. My orders are to avoid a scandal at any cost."

The Saint sat quietly, taking in the full significance of that astounding revelation that was so much more momentous for having been made without any direct statement. And, as he looked up at the house in a kind of breathlessness, he visualized the scene.

There was no space for secret passages in such an edifice as that; but for reasons known only to the architect a sun balcony on the first floor, built over the study, was linked with the ground by two flying buttresses on either side of it that angled down on either side of the study windows like gigantic staircases of three-foot steps. He could see the podgy figure of Sir Joseph Whipplethwaite creeping out with exaggerated caution, like a rhinoceros walking on tiptoe, and surveying the scene below. He saw the man clambering down the steps of the flying buttress, one by one, hampered by the sandbag clutched in one hand . . . saw him creeping up behind the unconscious artist . . . striking that single clumsy blow. With a scapegoat whom he disliked so heartily ready to be accused, why should he think he ran any risk?

"I know what you think of our abilities at the Yard," Teal was saying, in the same passionless way. "But we do get ideas sometimes. What you don't make allowances for is the fact that in our position we can't act on nothing more substantial than a brilliant idea, like detectives do in stories."

He was chewing monotonously, with his cherubic blue eyes fixed expressionlessly on the flying white ball on the court. "I think that if the treaty could somehow be recovered and put back where it was taken from, the guilty man would have to confess. An adventurer in a story, I suppose, might kidnap the suspected person and force him to say where it was hidden; but we can't do that. If anything like that happened in real life, and the kidnapper was caught, he'd be for it.

"By the way, Whipplethwaite will be driving back from London this evening. He has a green Rolls Royce, number XZ9919. . . . I expect you've had enough of this, haven't you?"

The detective stood up; and for the first time in a long while he looked at the Saint again. Simon had rarely seen those baby blue eyes so utterly sleepy and impassive.

"Yes—it's about time for my morning tankard of ale," Simon murmured easily.

They strolled slowly back to the house.

"That's Joseph's room — the one with the balcony — is it?" Simon asked idly.

Teal nodded. "Yes. That's where he was lying down."

"Does he suffer from indigestion?"

The detective flashed a glance at him. "I don't know. Why?"

"I should like to know," said the Saint.

Back in the house, he asked to be shown the dining-room. On the sideboard he discovered a round cardboard box carefully labelled—after the supererogatory habit of chemists — *"The Pills."* Underneath was the inscription: *"Two to be taken with water after each meal, as required."*

The Saint examined the tablets, and smiled gently to himself.

"Now could I see the bathroom?"

A very mystified Mr. Teal rang for the butler, and they were shown upstairs. The bathroom was one of those magnificent halls of colored marble and chromium plate which the most modern people find necessary for the preservation of their personal cleanliness; but Simon was interested only in the cupboard over the washbasin. It contained an imposing array of bottles, which Simon surveyed with some awe. Sir Joseph was apparently something of a hypochondriac.

Simon read the labels one by one, and nodded. "Is he short-sighted?"

"He wears glasses," said the detective.

"Splendid," murmured Simon, and went back to the hotel to supervise the refueling of his car without relieving Teal's curiosity.

At six o'clock that evening a very frightened man, who had undergone one of the slickest feats of abduction with violence that he could ever have imagined, and who had been very efficiently gagged, bound, blindfolded, and carried across country by the masked bandit who was responsible, sat with his back to a tree where he had been roughly propped up in a deep glade of the New Forest and watched the movements of his captor with goggling eyes.

The Saint had kindled a small, crisp fire of dry twigs, and he was feeding more wood to it and blowing into it with the dexterity of long experience, nursing it up into a solid cone of fierce red heat. Down there in the hollow where they were, the branches of the encircling trees filtered away the lingering twilight until it was almost as dark as midnight; but the glow of the fire showed up the Saint's masked face in macabre shading of red and black as he worked over it, like the face of a pantomime devil illuminated on a darkened stage.

The Saint's voice, however, was far from devilish—it was almost affectionate.

"You don't seem to realize, brother," he said, "that stealing secret treaties is quite a serious problem, even when they're the daft sort of treaties that We Politicians amuse ourselves with. And it's very wrong of you to think that you can shift the blame for your crimes on to that unfortunate ass whom you dislike so much. So you're going to tell me just where you put that treaty, and then there'll be no more nonsense about it."

The prisoner's eyes looked as if they might pop out of his head at any moment, and strangled grunts came through the gag as he struggled with the ropes that bound his arms to his sides; but the Saint was unmoved. The fire had been heaped up to his complete satisfaction.

"Our friend Mr. Teal," continued the Saint, in the same oracular vein, as he began to unlace the captive's shoes, "has been heard to complain about there being no Third Degree in this country. Now that's obviously ridiculous, because you can see for yourself that there is a Third Degree, and I'm it. Our first experiment is the perfect cure for those who suffer from cold feet. I'll show it to you now—unless you'd rather talk voluntarily?"

The prisoner shook his head vigorously, and emitted further strangled grunts which the Saint rightly interpreted as a refusal. Simon sighed, and hauled the man up close to the fire.

"Very well, brother. There's no compulsion at all. Any statement you like to make will be made of your own free will." He drew one of the man's bared feet closer to his little fire. "If you change your mind," he remarked genially, "you need only make one of those eloquent gurgling noises of yours, and I expect I shall understand."

It was only five minutes before the required gurgling noise came through the gag. But after the gag had been taken out it was another five minutes before the red-faced prisoner's speech became coherent enough to be useful.

Simon left him there, and met Teal in the hotel at half-past seven. "The treaty is pushed under the carpet in Whipplethwaite's study," he said.

The detective's pose of mountainous sleepiness failed him for once in his life. "As near as that?" he ejaculated. "Good Lord!"

The Saint nodded. "I don't think you'll have to worry your heads about whether he'll prosecute," he said. "The man's mentally deficient — I thought so from the beginning. And my special treatment hasn't improved his balance a lot. . . .

"As a general rule, problems

in detection bore me stiff—it's so much more entertaining to commit the crime yourself—but this one had its interesting points. A man who could hate a harmless ass like that enough to try and ruin him in such an elaborate way is a bit of a museum specimen. You know, Claud, I've been thinking about those brilliant ideas you say policemen get sometimes; it strikes me that the only thing you want—"

"Tell me about it when I come back," said Teal, looking at his watch. "I'd better see Whipplethwaite at once and get it over with."

"Give him my love," drawled the Saint, dipping his nose into the pint of beer which the detective had bought for him. "He'll get his satisfaction all right when you arrest Vallance."

The detective stood stock still and stared at him with an owl-like face. "Arrest *who?*" he stammered.

"Mr. Spencer Vallance — the bloke who put insomnia tablets in Whipplethwaite's dyspepsia bottle at lunch-time, nipped up to Whipplethwaite's room for the key, opened the safe, replaced the key, and then staggered out of the study bellowing that he'd been sandbagged. The bloke I've just been having words with," said the Saint.

Teal leaned back rather limply against the bar.

"Good Lord alive, Templar—"

"You meant well, Claud," said the Saint kindly. "And it was quite easy really. The only difficult part was that insomnia-tablet business. But I figured that the culprit might want to make quite sure that Joseph would be sleeping soundly when he buzzed up for the key, and the method was just an idea of mine. Then I saw that Joseph's insomnia dope was white, while his indigestion muck was light grey, and I guessed he must have been short-sighted to fall for the change-over.

"When I looked up at the house it was quite obvious that if anyone could climb down that flying buttress, someone else could just as easily climb up. That's why I was going to say something about your brilliant police ideas."

The Saint patted the detective consolingly on the back. "Policemen are swell so long as they plod along in their methodical way and sort out facts—they catch people that way quite often. But directly they get on to a really puzzling case, and for some reason it strikes them that they ought to be Great Detectives just for once—they fall down with the gooseberries. I've noticed those symptoms of detectivosis in you before, Claud. You ought to keep a tighter hand on yourself."

"How long have you known it

wasn't Whipplethwaite?" asked Teal.

"Oh, for months," said the Saint calmly. "But when your elephantine hints conjured up the vision of Joseph creeping stealthily down from the balcony upon his foe, couldn't you see a sort of grisly grotesqueness about it? I could. To stage a crime so that another man would naturally be suspected requires a certain warped efficiency of brain. To think for a moment that Joseph could have produced a scheme like that was the sort of brilliant idea that only a policeman in your condition would get. How on earth could Joseph have worked all that out?"

The Saint smiled blandly. "He's only a politician."

THE SAINT OFFERS—NEXT MONTH—THESE HEADLINERS

THE EFFETE ANGLER by LESLIE CHARTERIS

THE MAN WITH COPPER FINGERS by DOROTHY L. SAYERS

MURDER AT GALLEON KEY by PHILIP WYLIE

THE FRIGHTENED GIRL by WILBUR DANIEL STEELE

BLACK FOR INNOCENCE by ANTHONY GILBERT

SHOPPING FOR DEATH by RAY BRADBURY

DECEIVING CLOTHES by WILLIAM MACHARG

sweet music and murder

by . . . Octavus Roy Cohen

Patrolman Johnny didn't mind the ribbing so much. But with a girl like Margie to win—he just had to stay healthy, lucky and wise!

JOHNNY STEWART reported for work promptly at four o'clock. Less than one minute later the ribbing started, and Johnny needed no clairvoyant powers to discover that he was the goat. The fact that Sergeant Dan Tobin sparked the kidding was all he needed to know, because Dan wasn't the joking type, particularly where Johnny was concerned.

Officially Johnny Stewart was a patrolman attached to the Detective Bureau, Hollywood Division, Los Angeles Police Department. He worked the four-to-midnight shift and was inordinately proud of the fact that he was a detective, even though that designation brought him no more salary than he'd received when in uniform. It was a matter of prestige, of being known as one of the brain guys.

The joking was, for the most part, good-natured. Even Dan Tobin was smiling, though there was no warmth in his smile. It was apparent that he thought he had Johnny over a barrel, and

The creator of the famous Jim Hanvey has a wonderful gift for popping new surprises out of the magician's hat he has worn with such aplomb since many of us were knee-high to grasshoppers. A quite amazing hat it is, too—fashioned of such magical ingredients as a prose style of almost classical simplicity, a gift for characterization that could breathe life into even a tailor's dummy and—plot gems like this one.

that he intended to make the most of the situation. And—whatever the reason—Dan would be the type to use the setup to make time with Margie. Johnny didn't blame his rival too much on that score. He admitted that Margie was the sort of girl whose ends justified any means.

Dan started off by asking Johnny what he knew about Gus Quinlan, alias August Quinn, alias a half-dozen other things, and Johnny played it Dan's way by answering that he knew the estimable Mr. Quinlan was most earnestly wanted for various and assorted felonies, including murder and robbery.

"If you was ever near him, would you pick him up, Johnny?"

Johnny glanced at the amused faces of his fellow officers, trying to figure out what they had on him, and why Sergeant Dan Tobin was pitching such wide curves with such evident relish.

"Would you?" repeated Dan.

Johnny said he'd be tempted to.

"Then," inquired the sergeant, "why didn't you?"

"Why didn't I *what?*"

"Grab Quinlan when you had the chance?"

Johnny forced a laugh. "Why are you throwing from left field, Dan?" he asked. "I don't dig this stuff about Quinlan?"

"Well, whaddaya know?" Tobin's question was rhetorical, and was directed at the entire group of detectives who worked the night watch. "The guy doesn't dig it! Look, Johnny, it's all right to talk be-bop, but there ain't no rule says you gotta think that way, too."

"So I'm still waiting to hear how I fit in."

This was Dan Tobin's moment of triumph. All he needed, reflected Johnny, was to have Margie in his audience. Tobin said, "The Day Watch just came up with some definite dope on Gus Quinlan. All the time we been hunting for him, he was right under our noses. But he ain't here no more. He got wise that we were on to him and he took it on the lam. But for maybe three months he's been living . . . guess where, Johnny? Guess where Quinlan has been holed up?"

"Where?" asked Johnny dutifully.

"In an apartment house known as the Woodbine. Ever hear of it?"

The slightest suggestion of a worried frown appeared on Johnny Stewart's forehead. For the first time, he was beginning to sense the score. All right, if that was how it was, he might as well face up to it.

"Sure, I know the Woodbine," he said. "I live there."

"No kiddin'. What's your apartment number?"

"Four-twelve."

"If that don't beat all." Tobin

simulated surprise. "The way we got it, this here Gus Quinlan was livin' in four-ten. Just one thin wall away from you, Johnny."

Johnny glanced at Lieutenant Bert Lane, the Watch Commander, for verification. What he saw in Bert's eyes told him all he needed to know.

Sergeant Tobin persisted in his inquisition. "You must of passed Quinlan in the hall sometimes, Johnny. Or on the stairs. Or maybe him and you used to play gin-rummy together."

The young detective was intensely uncomfortable, but he made a valiant attempt to carry it off lightly. He stated that Quinlan was his closest friend, that they were virtually inseparable, that they wore each other's neckties and frequently ate together. He laid it on so thick that Sergeant Dan Tobin snorted with disgust.

"You ain't kiddin' nobody, Johnny," he said, his voice edgy. "But I still say that you must of seen the guy, living almost in the same room with him, and if you was worth a thin dime as a dick, his face would of registered."

"I'm just a dumb cop," stated Johnny, still trying to smile.

"You sure said it then, Sugarboy. Where you ought to be is back in uniform, pounding a beat in Newton Division. You ought to be—"

"Hold it, Dan!" That was the lieutenant's voice, putting a stop to things before they got out of hand. He knew that Tobin could get mean with the slightest provocation and that Johnny Stewart never backed away from trouble. The fact that the two detectives had been chasing the same girl—only daughter of a police captain—and that Johnny had been running on the inside, warned the lieutenant that it would be wise not to let the ribbing go any farther.

Johnny wasn't happy. He thought of how it would sound to Margie when Dan Tobin told her, with heavy wit and lavish embellishment. He thought of how it would sound to Margie's father who had been in the Detective Bureau for years and took a pride in the record he had made there.

Later the detectives drifted out in teams of two on new and routine jobs: stakeouts, shakedowns, interviews. Johnny was left in the office with Bert Lane. He looked into the lieutenant's friendly gray eyes, shrugged his shoulders and said, "I never saw the guy, Bert. Or if I did, he didn't register."

Lane said that was easily understandable. He suggested that Johnny make discreet inquiries around the apartment house: Maybe someone—the janitor, maybe, or the cleaning woman or the gardener—maybe one of them had gotten a slant on Quinlan's habits or a hint of the direc-

tion he'd have been liable to take once he started moving.

"Find out everything you can, Johnny," advised the lieutenant. "The guy's daily routine. How he amused himself." Bert already had the Quinlan file in his hand. "Here's all we've got on him. You already know his description. But did you know what sort of food he preferred or that he was crazy about strong tea? Did you know that he was a darned good piano player, and was in an orchestra before he did his first stretch? This file says that Quinlan had the idea he was a composer. He wrote a couple numbers while he was in San Quentin. Maybe that . . . hey, what's the matter, Johnny?"

Johnny had quit listening. He was staring at the lieutenant without seeing him. He was thinking: thinking so hard that the ideas seemed to be popping out on his forehead.

"That guy Quinlan," he said, as though talking to himself. "The piano . . . nights when I'd hit the sack at maybe two o'clock, and then go nuts listening to someone in the next apartment playing the same tune over and over again. Always the same thing . . . always. Sure, he *must* have been composing."

"Remember how it went, Johnny?"

"Sure. This way." The young, blonde detective hummed an unfamiliar melody.

Bert Lane said, "Not bad. Sort of thing it's easy to whistle. You sure it wasn't a published number he was practicing, Johnny?"

"Yes, I'm sure." Johnny was getting hopped up over a bright, fresh idea. "You see, he'd kick it around: change a bar here and a bar there. You don't do that unless you're composing."

"Ever hear anything else from Quinlan's apartment?"

Johnny thought a moment.

"The radio. When it wasn't the piano, it was the radio. Once in a while a news broadcast, but most of the time music, music, music. Popular stuff. And once a week . . . once a week . . . around two o'clock in the afternoon, he'd tune in on . . ." Johnny leaned forward suddenly and spoke tensely. "Look, Lieutenant—Dan Tobin can make this mighty uncomfortable for me, can't he? I mean, make it look bad that I was living right next door to this guy for so long and never even gave him a tumble."

"Yeh. He can make you look like a dope all right."

"But if I happened to grab Quinlan . . . on my own. That'd take me from behind the eight-ball, wouldn't it?"

"And how! But don't get any crazy ideas, Johnny. Quinlan played it cute and he'll keep on playing it that way. My hunch is that he's long gone from here."

"Okay. But I've still got an idea."

"Want to talk it over?"

"No, Lieutenant. Even to you it'd sound crazy."

Johnny quit talking. The Watch Commander left him to his own thoughts. If the kid had ideas, that was swell. A dick was supposed to have 'em. Johnny knew the theory of good investigative work: play your hunches right across the board. A detective could be wrong a thousand times and no harm was done, provided he was right just one time. Just once.

There was one thing, aside from Gus Quinlan's home-made melody, that kept pounding through Johnny's brain. That was the name Pete Lowery. Without fail, the wanted criminal who had occupied the adjoining apartment would tune in on Pete Lowery's weekly broadcast. And he had Pete Lowery records. He must have had, because there would be Pete Lowery music at times when the famous Pete wasn't on the air.

That, reflected Johnny, could mean something . . . especially as Pete Lowery and His Orchestra had recently opened an indefinite engagement in the Tropic Room of the Crestline Hotel. They were broadcasting from Los Angeles now, but if a guy was gone on a certain musician or a certain band, he'd listen in wherever he was, however securely he was hidden.

Johnny did his daily work earnestly. Because Sergeant Dan Tobin continued riding him, the other detectives laid off. A rib was a rib . . . there wasn't any fun riding a guy indefinitely.

And Margie! She was sweet and affectionate, and made a point of explaining—too elaborately—that what had happened wasn't Johnny's fault, no matter what Dan Tobin said, no matter how loudly her father snorted. She defended him so earnestly that Johnny realized she was trying to convince herself, and not achieving any signal success.

The young detective was becoming rather grim about the situation. He had eight days off a month, and several of those he devoted to working on his own time. He talked to every employee of the Woodbine apartments, to everyone who might have seen Gus Quinlan or have spoken to him; to everyone who might have some knowledge of his daily habits, his personal idiosyncrasies.

He did something else, too: he started spending his free evenings at the hotel where Pete Lowery and His Orchestra were dispensing dance music. He studied Pete carefully, trying to figure out whether the slim, dynamic little guy was the sort who would play ball. Through one of the dining room captains, Johnny managed

to meet the orchestra leader, and they had a sandwich together. On their second meeting Johnny bought Pete Lowery a dinner, which was something he couldn't really afford, but which seemed to be the proper procedure if he was to learn all he needed to know about Lowery's character. And he needed to know a lot.

The thirteen-dollar dinner check paid off. Johnny started it by expressing his admiration for Pete and his musical career. Lowery countered with a shrug. "Look, Feller," he said, "my job's all right. But when I think of what you're doing: real, honest-to-gosh detective work . . . that's what I call a profession. There's nothing I'd like better than that sort of work—provided I had the ability and the guts."

There was more of the same. It didn't take Johnny Stewart long to know that he had struck pay dirt. What he had found in Pete Lowery was this: the talented little musician was cop-happy.

On the occasion of his fourth conference with Lowery, Johnny Stewart iooked across the room and saw Margie Watts with Sergeant Dan Tobin.

That didn't make him feel too good. Not that Margie didn't have a right to go dancing with Dan Tobin or any other man . . . but seeing them together put a damper on his spirit. Later, Dan danced with Margie and guided her to the table where Johnny was sitting.

"Fixin' to turn in your badge?" asked Tobin.

"Huh?"

"Well, I heard tell you've been hanging around Pete Lowery. I thought maybe you was studying to be a musician or something."

"Something," answered Johnny with a forced smile. "That's just what I'm studying: something."

"Kinda difficult for a guy who don't know which end is up," commented Tobin. "And if you hadda hang around here, it would seem to me you'd want to have a girl with you."

Johnny didn't answer that one. There wasn't any answer. But obviously Margie would think that if he'd been making the Tropic Room his headquarters on his off nights, instead of taking her places . . . well, she'd have too much pride to say anything, but she couldn't conceal from him the fact that she felt that she had been left out in the cold.

That night Detective Johnny Stewart made his pitch. He had built up to it slowly and carefully because he didn't want anything to go wrong, he wanted Pete Lowery to be one hundred percent on his side.

So, during the long intermission, he told Pete about Gus Quinlan and the part that that notorious criminal had played in

putting him in the doghouse. "And I can't stay there, Pete," he said. "If it's possible to grab that guy, I've got to do it."

"Hmm . . ." No question that Pete was interested. "It would seem that if I were Quinlan I'd be hiding far, far away from here by now: some place where no members of the Los Angeles police force would be likely to show up."

"Right as rain," agreed Johnny. "There isn't a lick of sense in me trying to chase a smart cookie like Quinlan. But I was wondering . . ."

"Wondering what?"

"Whether I could get him to chase *me?*"

Pete did a slow take on that one. "Now who's crazy?" he asked good-naturedly. "What criminal would start looking for a cop who was looking for him?"

"Quinlan might."

"I don't get it."

"I didn't think you would. So the first thing I've got to explain to you, is that I need your help. Without it, I couldn't get half way to first base."

Johnny let that sink in and then he said, "How do you like this tune?" Slowly, carefully, he started whistling the melody which Gus Quinlan had played, hour after hour, in the now-deserted apartment. When he finished, Pete Lowery nodded approvingly.

"Not bad," he commented. "What is it?"

"Did you ever hear it?"

"No . . . And I've heard 'em all."

Then Johnny told him the background of the tune, and of how the music had kept him awake many nights, and had returned to haunt him on the days when he was being kidded for having lived next door to a desperately wanted criminal without ever having recognized him or made a move to pick him up.

"It's my hunch," stated Johnny, "that if Quinlan composed that number he'll possess all of the temperament any other composer would have. I know for sure that he listens to every broadcast you make. No matter where he is now, he'll sooner or later listen to your program. So if you make an arrangement of Gus's tune and have your boys play it once or twice on every broadcast . . ."

Pete Lowery was bubbling with enthusiasm. "I think you've got something, Johnny," he said. "Maybe he won't hear it the first time I play it, or the second or the third . . . but eventually he will, and then he'll bust a gut to find out where I got it. And when he does . . ."

"I'll be here, Pete. But remember this: nobody is to be told anything about where you got the tune, or why you're plugging it. That understood?"

Pete said it was understood. He said, further, that it was a thrill for him to help a real, live, smart detective.

"Smart!" Johnny repeated the adjective with some bitterness. "Seems like you're the only man in the world who still thinks I've got brains enough to fly a kite."

Ten days later Pete Lowery and His Orchestra played a new, unknown and nameless melody on their national radio hookup. Three nights after that, they played it as part of their television show. And thereafter it was played for every video and audio performance, and, in addition, they plugged it insistently as a dance number each night when they were not on the airwaves.

Night after night Johnny maintained a lone vigil in the Tropic Room at the Crestline, waiting, wondering, hoping. He had told Lieutenant Bert Lane what he was doing, and Bert had approved, though not without considerable skepticism.

Meanwhile, Sergeant Dan Tobin was not the sort of man to fail to see the strategic advantage that Johnny's inexplicable actions afforded. He was with Margie Watts more frequently than he ever had been, though he had no faintest idea that a trap was being set for Gus Quinlan. In his simple, direct, uncomplicated thoughts, Dan decided that Johnny might have developed a new feminine interest. In that way, and that way only, should he see the sense of Johnny spending so much of his time in the same room, listening to the same orchestra.

Johnny grew more and more discouraged as the nights passed. Fine detective he was, he told himself bitterly—a real clever guy. He'd gone to all this trouble, wasted all this time, and for what? He gave his experiment another day and another, and then two additional weeks. And just when he was ready to call it quits, something happened.

The stage could not have been more perfectly set. The Tropic Room was crowded, and, to supply the icing for the cake, Sergeant Dan Tobin appeared with Margie Watts and took a little table in the corner.

Johnny was so busy with unhappy thoughts about Margie that he didn't see the wiry man enter the room, sidle up to the bar and stand where he could watch the room and the orchestra through the mirror.

Johnny's brief clash with Tobin and Margie hadn't bolstered his morale. Dan had stopped dancing directly in front of the table where Johnny was sitting, and inquired caustically how he was getting along in his musical education. Johnny answered grimly that he was doing fine. He plastered a grin on his face as though Tobin's ribaldry and Margie's disapproval didn't hurt.

The broadcast took an hour. After the midway station break, the second number played was the melody that Quinlan had composed. There were more numbers after that, all of which the crowd received with enthusiasm. Then Pete Lowery signed off, ending the broadcast, and notified his musicians that they could have a good long rest while the musical chores were taken over by a small but effective rumba outfit.

Johnny was looking at the rostrum, hoping that Pete Lowery would join him for a drink, a bite or a little conversation. He felt moody, depressed and lonely. But miserable as he was, he yet saw a man detach himself from the bar and move toward the rostrum which had been vacated by all the members of the Pete Lowery band except Pete himself.

At first the man didn't register. He was no more than five feet eight in height, and couldn't have tipped the scales at better than one hundred and sixty. His hair was brown and sparse, and his features were sharp.

What the stranger did attracted Johnny's attention. The man moved in on Pete Lowery and said something. Pete shook his head, shrugged his shoulder and spread his hands in a noncommittal gesture.

It was then that Johnny Stewart caught something which he had been trained to observe: a tensing of the stranger's figure, a pugnaciously outthrust jaw and then a hand that reached out and grabbed Pete Lowery's arm in a gesture which was definitely on the hostile side.

Instinct brought Johnny to his feet. He hadn't gone more than a half dozen steps toward the rostrum when he recognized Gus Quinlan.

He was thinking fast. Quinlan had walked into the trap. But that didn't mean that he was Johnny's for the asking. Gus was bad, all the way through. He had murdered at least one man and tried to kill two others.

Obviously Quinlan didn't think of himself as a sitting duck, obviously he was at this moment merely the bewildered composer whose unpublished number had been pirated. But Johnny realized that Gus Quinlan would be armed and dangerous.

The young detective moved slowly. Time enough to let Quinlan get his guard up when it could no longer be postponed. Then, too, Johnny was aware of his responsibility for the lives and safety of innocent bystanders.

The detective observed a growing tenseness between Gus Quinlan and Pete Lowery. Quinlan's cheeks were flushed with anger. Johnny felt that he'd enjoy having reinforcements at hand . . . and so he looked over to where Sergeant Dan Tobin was sitting.

Tobin was looking directly at

Gus Quinlan, but there wasn't any recognition in the Sergeant's eyes. He was apparently telling Margie Watts something about Pete Lowery, or maybe he was talking about Johnny himself. In any event, Tobin had no suspicion that trouble was brewing.

As Johnny edged closer to the rostrum he caught a snatch of conversation between Lowery and Gus Quinlan. Gus's voice was low and tight and furious, "Well, where didja get it? That's what I'm askin' yuh. Who sold you the number?"

Pete Lowery knew the identity of his inquisitor, and Pete had the normal, natural reaction of a normal, naturally frightened man. He was not only scared—which was to be expected—but he was jittery, which could prove unhealthy.

Pete said, unsteadily: "I told you before, I don't know. Somebody brought it to me. It sounded good, so I made an arrangement, and . . ."

"Don't give me no more of that hogwash, Lowery."

"It's true." There was a note of desperation in the musician's voice. Then he caught sight of Johnny Stewart who was edging closer and closer. "And anyway," he said valiantly, "I don't know who you are, or what's it to you."

Quinlan said, "I wrote that number, that's what's it to me. Now leave us go back to your dressing room, and straighten this thing out."

"No . . ." There was an edge of panic in Pete Lowery's voice. "We'll talk right here."

Quinlan said something quick and angry. His right hand probed into the right side pocket of his sack suit. "You'll do what I tell you, or else . . ."

Pete Lowery cast a beseeching glance in Johnny Stewart's direction. Quinlan, every nerve alert, followed the direction of his eyes. He didn't know Johnny, but that didn't matter: by instinct he knew a cop when he saw one.

Quinlan's hand came out of his pocket. He was holding a gun. At that instant Johnny Stewart moved. He moved fast. He grabbed Quinlan's gun hand as it came up. He had no time or opportunity to draw his own gun. Two women screamed. Guests scrambled to their feet. A chair was overturned.

The fight was brief and vicious. Quinlan butted with the top of his head, he kicked viciously at Johnny's shins and groin. He lashed out with his free hand, bringing blood from Johnny's nose. Somebody rushed to the telephone to call the police, but it was obvious that whatever was going to happen would be finished long before outside help could reach them.

Ordinarily Johnny could have handled Quinlan, but no man is easily handled when he knows

that his life is at stake. Johnny pressed his big body against that of Quinlan, taking the punishment that the other man was meting out, oblivious to the pain, knowing that—whatever happened—he mustn't let go of Quinlan's wrist.

He surged forward, and Quinlan went down. Johnny was on top. They thrashed about on the floor. Three music racks were knocked over, spilling sheets of music over the combatants.

Johnny slammed his head into Quinlan's face. The man grunted with pain and relaxed for just an instant. It was then that Johnny, exerting the ultimate ounce of his strength, jerked the gun loose. It clattered from the rostrum and skidded across the dance floor.

The battling men were the center of a big crowd now. Pete Lowery was yelling something, but Johnny couldn't distinguish the words. Then the detective rose, dragging Quinlan with him. He doubled his fist and sent it crashing against Quinlan's jaw. The man's body sagged. Johnny got behind him and pinioned his arms. He looked around. Margie Watts was there, tense and excited. And Sergeant Dan Tobin was there, too, looking bewildered—but on the job as a policeman. Johnny said, "You got your cuffs, Dan?"

Dan had his cuffs. He snapped them on Gus Quinlan's wrists. Quinlan was sobbing with futile fury. Dan Tobin said angrily, "What's this all about, Stewart? Why you brawling in a public place?"

Johnny did not answer. Through battered lips he grinned at Margie. Then he spoke to Tobin. "Thanks for the assist, Dan," he said. "Good going."

"Yeh. But what . . ." Dan Tobin shrugged. "Anyway, I'm in the clear. The guy had a gun."

"Sure, he did. Sure."

"But how did you know?"

Johnny said, "Take another look, Dan."

Dan gazed intently at the prisoner. Then he exhaled audibly. He said, in an awed voice, "You're kiddin', Johnny. You must be kiddin'."

"No," answered Johnny, "I'm not kidding. It's Gus Quinlan, all right. When a murderer has an ear for sweet music—you've got the bait with which to trap him."

Margie had moved close to Johnny Stewart. Her face radiated love and pride.

"You knew," she stated positively. "You expected him."

Johnny nodded. "I hoped it would be this way, Margie."

"Quinlan!" Sergeant Dan Tobin was utterly deflated. "It's him, all right . . . but it still ain't possible. Things like this just don't happen."

There was the wail of a police siren outside. Then it stopped

abruptly and four uniformed cops burst into the Tropic Room and made straight for the group clustered in front of the rostrum. Johnny turned the prisoner over to them and started mopping at his face with a handkerchief. He looked happy.

Finally Dan Tobin spoke. In his voice there was incredulity and a hint of awe.

"It ain't nothin' but plain, dumb luck," he said. "That's all you had, Johnny—luck."

Detective Stewart was grinning outwardly and inwardly. "You're so right, Dan," he said. "I was just lucky."

And that was when Margie Watts slipped her hand into Johnny's. She said, "I've got two hunches, Johnny. The first is that this wasn't entirely luck. And the second . . ."

"The second?" prompted Johnny.

"The second hunch," she said, "is that you're going to keep on being lucky—if you want to be."

"I got a night off tomorrow," said Johnny Stewart. "How about you and me coming here for dinner, Margie, where we can really talk things over?"

She didn't say a word. She merely nodded and smiled. But the way she did it told Johnny Stewart all he needed to know.

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sportsmen will thrill to—and all
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in the next SAINT

---

the fallen idol

by . . . Graham Greene

Philip had only one shining idol in the great, lonely house. How could a child cope with feet of clay, and murder's dark unmasking?

WHEN THE FRONT door had shut them out and the butler Baines had turned back into the dark heavy hall, Philip began to live. He stood in front of the nursery door, listening until he heard the engine of the taxi die out along the street. His parents were gone for a fortnight's holiday; he was "between nurses," one dismissed and the other not arrived; he was alone in the great Belgravia house with Baines and Mrs. Baines.

He could go anywhere, even through the green baize door to the pantry or down the stairs to the basement living room. He felt a stranger in his home because he could go into any room and all the rooms were empty.

You could only guess who had once occupied them: the rack of pipes in the smoking room beside the elephant tusks, the carved wood tobacco jar; in the bedroom the pink hangings and pale perfumes and the three-quarter finished jars of cream which Mrs. Baines had not yet

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Graham Greene holds a preeminent position among his peers on both sides of the Atlantic as the greatest living master of the chilling suspense story skillfully blended with psychological intuition of a scalpel-like dexterity. He has aptly labeled his excursions into crime "Entertainments," which indeed they are, from his famed BRIGHTON ROCK *to this truly magnificent Sir Carol Reed prize-winning movie novelette of a child's secret world.*

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cleared away; the high glaze on the never-opened piano in the drawing room, the china clock, the silly little tables and the silver; but here Mrs. Baines was already busy, pulling down the curtains, covering the chairs in dust-sheets.

"Be off out of here, Master Philip," and she looked at him with her hateful peevish eyes, while she moved around, getting everything in order, meticulous and loveless and doing her duty.

Philip Lane went downstairs and pushed at the baize door; he looked into the pantry, but Baines was not there, then he set foot, for the first time on the stairs to the basement. Again he had the sense: this is life. All his seven nursery years vibrated with the strange, the new experience. His crowded busy brain was like a city which feels the earth tremble at a distant earthquake shock. He was apprehensive, but he was happier than he had ever been. Everything was more important than before.

Baines was reading a newspaper in his shirt-sleeves. He said: "Come in, Phil, and make yourself at home. Wait a moment and I'll do the honors," and going to a white cleaned cupboard he brought out a bottle of ginger beer and half a Dundee cake.

"Half-past eleven in the morning," Baines said. "It's opening time, my boy," and he cut the cake and poured out the ginger beer. He was more genial than Philip had ever known him, more at his ease, a man in his own home.

"Shall I call Mrs. Baines?" Philip asked, and he was glad when Baines said no. She was busy. She liked to be busy, so why interfere with her pleasure? He didn't want to upset her.

"A spot of drink at half-past eleven," Baines said, pouring himself out a glass of ginger beer, "gives an appetite for chop and does no man any harm."

"A chop?" Philip asked.

"Old Coasters," Baines said, "call all food chop."

"But it's not a chop?"

"Well, it might be, you know, cooked with palm oil. And then some paw-paw to follow."

Philip looked out of the basement window at the dry stone yard, the ash-can and the legs going up and down beyond the railings.

"Was it hot there?"

"Ah, you never felt such heat. Not a nice heat, mind, like you get in the park on a day like this. Wet," Baines said, "corruption." He cut himself a slice of cake. "Smelling of rot," Baines said, rolling his eyes round the small basement room, from clean cupboard to clean cupboard, the sense of bareness, of nowhere to hide a man's secrets. With an air of regret for something lost he took a long draught of ginger beer.

"Why did father live out there?"

"It was his job," Baines said, "same as this is mine now. And it was mine then too. It was a man's job. You wouldn't believe it now, but I've had forty Negroes under me, doing what I told them to."

"Why did you leave?"

"I married Mrs. Baines."

Philip took the slice of Dundee cake in his hand and munched it round the room. He felt very old, independent and judicial; he was aware that Baines was talking to him as man to man. He never called him Master Philip as Mrs. Baines did, who was servile when she was not authoritative.

Baines had seen the world; he had seen beyond the railings, beyond the tired legs of typists, the Pimlico parade to and from Victoria. He sat there over his ginger pop with the resigned dignity of an exile; Baines didn't complain; he had chosen his fate; and if his fate was Mrs. Baines he had only himself to blame.

But today, because the house was almost empty and Mrs. Baines was upstairs and there was nothing to do, he allowed himself a little acidity.

"I'd go back tomorrow if I had the chance."

"Did you ever shoot a black man?"

"I never had any call to shoot," Baines said. "Of course I carried a gun. But you didn't need to treat them bad. That just made them stupid. Why," Baines said, bowing his thin gray hair with embarrassment over the ginger pop, "I love some of those Negroes. I couldn't help loving them. There they'd be, laughing, holding hands; they liked to touch each other; it made them feel fine to know the other fellow was round.

"It didn't mean anything we could understand; two of them would go about all day without losing hold, grown men, but it wasn't love; it didn't mean anything we could understand."

"Eating between meals," Mrs. Baines said. "What would your mother say, Master Philip?"

She came down the steep stairs to the basement, her hands full of pots of cream and salve, tubes of grease and paste. "You ought not to encourage him, Baines," she said, sitting down in a wicker armchair and screwing up her small ill-humored eyes at the Coty lipstick, Pond's cream, the Leichner rouge and Cyclax powder and Elizabeth Arden astringent.

She threw them one by one into the wastepaper basket. She saved only the cold cream. "Telling the boy stories," she said. "Go along to the nursery, Master Philip, while I get lunch."

Philip climbed the stairs to the baize door. He heard Mrs. Baines's voice like the voice in a

nightmare when the small Price light has guttered in the saucer and the curtains move; it was sharp and shrill and full of malice, louder than people ought to speak, exposed.

"Sick to death of your ways, Baines, spoiling the boy. Time you did some work about the house," Mrs. Baines said.

But he couldn't hear what Baines said in reply. He pushed open the baize door, came up like a small earth animal in his gray flannel shorts into a wash of sunlight on a parquet floor, the gleam of mirrors dusted and polished and beautified by Mrs. Baines.

Something broke downstairs, and Philip sadly mounted the stairs to the nursery. He pitied Baines; it occurred to him how happily they could live together in the empty house if Mrs. Baines were called away. He didn't want to play with his Meccano sets; he wouldn't take out his train or his soldiers; he sat at the table with his chin on his hands: this is life; and suddenly he felt responsible for Baines, as if he were the master of the house and Baines an aging servant who deserved to be cared for. There was not much one could do; he decided at least to be good.

He was not surprised when Mrs. Baines was agreeable at lunch, he was used to her changes. Now it was "another helping of meat, Master Philip," or "Master Philip, a little more of this nice pudding." It was a pudding he liked, Queen's pudding with a perfect meringue, but he wouldn't eat a second helping lest she might count that a victory. She was the kind of woman who thought that any injustice could be counterbalanced by something good to eat.

She was sour, but she liked making sweet things; one never had to complain of a lack of jam or plums; she ate well herself and added soft sugar to the meringue and the strawberry jam. The half light through the basement window set the motes moving above her pale hair like dust as she sifted the sugar, and Baines crouched over his plate saying nothing.

Again Philip felt responsibility. Baines had looked forward to this, and Baines was disappointed: everything was being spoiled. The sensation of disappointment was one which Philip could share; knowing nothing of love or jealousy or passion, he could understand better than anyone this grief, something hoped for not happening, something promised not fulfilled, something exciting turning dull.

"Baines," he said, "will you take me for a walk this afternoon?"

"No," Mrs. Baines said, "no. That he won't. Not with all the silver to clean."

"There's a fortnight to do it in," Baines said.

"Work first, pleasure afterwards." Mrs. Baines helped herself to some more meringue.

Baines suddenly put down his spoon and fork and pushed his plate away. "Blast," he said.

"Temper," Mrs. Baines said softly, "temper. Don't you go breaking any more things, Baines, and I won't have you swearing in front of the boy. Master Philip, if you've finished you can get down." She skinned the rest of the meringue off the pudding.

"I want to go for a walk," Philip said.

"You'll go and have a rest."

"I will go for a walk."

"Master Philip," Mrs. Baines said. She got up from the table, leaving her meringue unfinished, and came towards him, thin, menacing, dusty in the basement room. "Master Philip, you do as you're told."

She took him by the arm and squeezed it gently; she watched him with a joyless passionate glitter and above her head the feet of the typists trudged back to the Victoria offices after the lunch interval.

"Why shouldn't I go for a walk?" But he weakened; he was scared and ashamed of being scared. This was life; a strange passion he couldn't understand moving in the basement room. He saw a small pile of broken glass swept into a corner by the wastepaper basket. He looked to Baines for help and only intercepted hate; the sad hopeless hate of something behind bars.

"Why shouldn't I?" he repeated.

"Master Philip," Mrs. Baines said, "you've got to do as you're told. You mustn't think just because your father's away there's nobody here to—"

"You wouldn't dare," Philip cried, and was startled by Baines's low interjection, "There's nothing she wouldn't dare."

"I hate you," Philip said to Mrs. Baines. He pulled away from her and ran to the door, but she was there before him; she was old, but she was quick.

"Master Philip," she said, "you'll say you're sorry." She stood in front of the door quivering with excitement. "What would your father do if he heard you say that?"

She put a hand out to seize him, dry and white with constant soda, the nails cut to the quick, but he backed away and put the table between them, and suddenly to his surprise she smiled; she became again as servile as she had been arrogant.

"Get along with you, Master Philip," she said with glee. "I see I'm going to have my hands full till your father and mother come back."

She left the door unguarded and when he passed her she slapped him playfully. "I've got

too much to do today to trouble about you. I haven't covered half the chairs," and suddenly even the upper part of the house became unbearable to him as he thought of Mrs. Baines moving round shrouding the sofas, laying out the dust-sheets.

So he wouldn't go upstairs to get his cap but walked straight out across the shining hall into the street, and again, as he looked this way and looked that way, it was life he was in the middle of.

II

It was the pink sugar cakes in the window on a paper doily, the ham, the slab of mauve sausage, the wasps driving like small torpedoes across the pane that caught Philip's attention. His feet were tired by pavements; he had been afraid to cross the road, had simply walked first in one direction, then in the other.

He was nearly home now, the square was at the end of the street; this was a shabby outpost of Pimlico, and he smudged the pane with his nose, looking for sweets, and saw between the cakes and ham a different Baines. He hardly recognized the bulbous eyes, the bald forehead. It was a happy, bold and buccaneering Baines, even though it was, when you looked closer, a desperate Baines.

Philip had never seen the girl. He remembered Baines had a niece and he thought that this might be her. She was thin and drawn, and she wore a white mackintosh; she meant nothing to Philip; she belonged to a world about which he knew nothing at all. He couldn't make up stories about her, as he could make them up about withered Sir Hubert Reed, the Permanent Secretary, about Mrs. Wince-Dudley, who came up once a year from Penstanley in Suffolk with a green umbrella and an enormous black handbag, as he could make them up about the upper servants in all the houses where he went to tea and games.

She just didn't belong; he thought of mermaids and Undine; but she didn't belong there either, nor to the adventures of Emil, nor to the Bastables. She sat there looking at an iced pink cake in the detachment and mystery of the completely disinherited, looking at the half-used pots of powder which Baines had set out on the marble-topped table between them.

Baines was urging, hoping, entreating, commanding, and the girl looked at the tea and the china pots and cried. Baines passed his handkerchief across the table, but she wouldn't wipe her eyes, she screwed it in her palm and let the tears run down, wouldn't do anything, wouldn't speak, would only put up a silent despairing resistance to what she

dreaded and wanted and refused to listen to at any price. The two brains battled over the tea-cups loving each other, and there came to Philip outside beyond the ham and wasps and dusty Pimlico pane, a confused indication of the struggle.

He was inquisitive and he did not understand and he wanted to know. He went and stood in the doorway to see better, he was less sheltered than he had ever been; other people's lives for the first time touched and pressed and moulded. He would never escape that scene. In a week he had forgotten it, but it conditioned his career, the long austerity of his life; when he was dying he said, "Who is she?"

Baines had won; he was cocky and the girl was happy. She wiped her face, she opened a pot of powder, and their fingers touched across the table. It occurred to Philip that it would be amusing to imitate Mrs. Baines's voice and call "Baines" to him from the door.

It shriveled them; you couldn't describe it in any other way; it made them smaller, they weren't happy any more and they weren't bold. Baines was the first to recover and trace the voice, but that didn't make things as they were. The sawdust was spilled out of the afternoon: nothing you did could mend it, and Philip was scared.

"I didn't mean . . ." He wanted to say that he loved Baines, that he had only wanted to laugh at Mrs. Baines. But he had discovered that you couldn't laugh at Mrs. Baines. She wasn't Sir Hubert Reed, who used steel nibs and carried a pen-wiper in his pocket, she wasn't Mrs. Wince-Dudley; she was darkness when the night-light went out in a draught; she was the frozen blocks of earth he had seen one winter in a graveyard when someone said, "They need an electric drill." She was the flowers gone bad and smelling in the little closet room at Penstanely. There was nothing to laugh about. You had to endure her when she was there and forget about her quickly when she was away, suppress the thought of her, ram it down deep.

Baines said, "It's only Phil," beckoned him in and gave him the pink iced cake the girl hadn't eaten, but the afternoon was broken, the cake was like dry bread in the throat: The girl left them at once; she even forgot to take the powder; like a small blunt icicle in her white mackintosh she stood in the doorway with her back to them, then melted into the afternoon.

"Who is she?" Philip asked. "Is she your niece?"

"Oh yes," Baines said, "that's who she is; she's my niece," and poured the last drops on to the coarse black leaves in the teapot.

"May as well have another cup," Baines said.

"The cup that cheers," he said hopelessly, watching the bitter black fluid drain out of the spout.

"Have a glass of ginger pop, Phil?"

"I'm sorry. I'm sorry, Baines."

"It's not your fault, Phil. Why, I could believe it wasn't you at all, but her. She creeps in everywhere." He fished two leaves out of his cup and laid them on the back of his hand, a thin soft flake and a hard stalk. He beat them with his hand: "Today," and the stalk detached itself, "tomorrow, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday," but the flake wouldn't come, stayed where it was, drying under his blows, with a resistance you wouldn't believe it to possess. "The tough one wins," Baines said.

He got up and paid the bill and out they went into the street. Baines said, "I don't ask you to say what isn't true. But you needn't mention to Mrs. Baines you met us here."

"Of course not," Philip said, and catching something of Sir Hubert Reed's manner, "I understand, Baines." But he didn't understand a thing; he was caught up in other people's darkness.

"It was stupid," Baines said. "So near home, but I hadn't time to think, you see. I'd got to see her."

"Yes, Baines. Yes, of course."

"I haven't time to spare," Baines said. "I'm not young. I've got to see that she's all right."

"Of course you have, Baines."

"Mrs. Baines will get it out of you if she can."

"You can trust me, Baines," Philip said in a dry important Reed voice; and then, "look out. She's at the window watching." And there indeed she was, looking up at them, between the lace curtains, from the basement room, speculating.

"Need we go in Baines?" Philip asked, cold lying heavy on his stomach like too much pudding; he clutched Baines's arm.

"Careful," Baines said softly, "careful."

"But need we go in, Baines? It's early. Take me for a walk in the park."

"Better not."

"But I'm frightened, Baines."

"You haven't any cause," Baines said. "Nothing's going to hurt you. You just run along upstairs to the nursery. I'll go down by the area and talk to Mrs. Baines." But even he stood hesitating at the top of the stone steps, pretending not to see her where she watched between the curtains, "In at the front door, Phil, and up the stairs."

Philip didn't linger in the hall; he ran, slithering on the parquet Mrs. Baines had polished, to the stairs. Through the drawing-

room doorway on the first floor he saw the draped chairs, even the china clock on the mantel was covered like a canary's cage; as he passed it, it chimed the hour, muffled and secret under the duster.

On the nursery table he found his supper laid out; a glass of milk and a piece of bread and butter, a sweet biscuit and a little cold Queen's pudding without the meringue. He had no appetite; he strained his ears for Mrs. Baines's coming, for the sound of voices, but the basement held its secrets; the green baize door shut off that world. He drank the milk and ate the biscuit, but he didn't touch the rest, and presently he could hear the soft precise footfalls of Mrs. Baines on the stairs; she was a good servant, she walked softly; she was a determined woman, she walked precisely.

Philip shivered.

But she wasn't angry when she came in; she was ingratiating as she opened the night nursery door—"Did you have a good walk, Master Philip?"—pulled down the blinds, laid out his pajamas, came back to clear his supper. "I'm glad Baines found you. Your mother wouldn't have liked your being out alone." She examined the tray. "Not much appetite, have you, Master Philip? Why don't you try a little of this nice pudding? I'll bring you up some more jam for it."

"No, no, thank you, Mrs. Baines," Philip said.

"You ought to eat more," Mrs. Baines said. She sniffed round the room like a dog. "You didn't take any pots out of the wastepaper basket in the kitchen, did you, Master Philip?"

"No," Philip said.

"Of course you wouldn't. I just wanted to make sure." She patted his shoulder and her fingers flashed to his lapel; she picked off a tiny crumb of pink sugar. "Oh, Master Philip," she said, "that's why you haven't any appetite. You've been buying sweet cakes. That's not what your pocket money's for."

"But I didn't," Philip said. "I didn't."

She tasted the sugar with the tip of her tongue. "Don't tell lies to me, Master Philip. I won't stand for it any more than your father would."

"I didn't, I didn't," Philip said. "They gave it to me. I mean Baines."

But she had pounced on the word "they." She had got what she wanted; there was no doubt about that, even when you didn't know what it was she wanted. Philip was angry and miserable and disappointed because he had not kept Baines's secret. Baines oughtn't to have trusted him; grown-up people should keep their own secrets, and yet here was Mrs. Baines immediately entrusting him with another.

"Let me tickle your palm and see it you can keep a secret." But he put his hand behind him; he wouldn't be touched. "It's a secret between us, Master Philip, that I know all about them. I suppose she was having tea with him," she speculated.

"Why shouldn't she?" he said, the responsibility for Baines weighing on his spirit, the idea that he had got to keep her secret when he hadn't kept Baines's making him miserable with the unfairness of life. "She was nice."

"She was nice, was he?" Mrs. Baines said in a bitter voice he wasn't used to.

"And she's his niece."

"So that's what he said," Mrs. Baines struck softly back at him like the clock under the duster. She tried to be jocular. "The old scoundrel. Don't you tell him I know, Master Philip." She stood very still between the table and the door, thinking very hard, planning something. "Promise you won't tell. I'll give you that Meccano set, Master Philip . . ."

He turned his back on her; he wouldn't promise, but he would not tell. He would have nothing to do with their secrets, the responsibilities they were determined to lay on him. He was only anxious to forget. He had received already a larger dose of life that he had bargained for and he was scared. "A 2A Meccano set, Master Philip." He never opened his Meccano set again, never built anything, never created anything, died, the old dilettante, sixty years later, with nothing to show rather than preserve the memory of Mrs. Baines's malicious voice saying good night, her soft determined footfalls on the stairs to the basement, going down, going down.

III

The sun poured in between the curtains and Baines was beating a tattoo on the water-can. "Glory, glory," Baines said. He sat down on the end of the bed and said, "I beg to announce that Mrs. Baines has been called away. Her mother's dying. She won't be back till tomorrow."

"Why did you wake me up so early?" Philip said.

He watched Baines with uneasiness; he wasn't going to be drawn in; he'd learnt his lesson. It wasn't right for a man of Baines's age to be so merry. It made a grown person human in the same way that you were human. For if a grown-up could behave so childishly, you were liable to find yourself in their world. It was enough that it came at you in dreams; the witch at the corner, the man with a knife.

"It's very early," he complained, even though he loved Baines, even though he couldn't help being glad that Baines was happy.

He was divided by the fear and the attraction of life.

"I want to make this a long day," Baines said. "This is the best time." He pulled the curtains back. "It's a bit misty. The cat's been out all night. There she is, sniffing round the area. That haven't taken in any milk at fifty-nine. Emma's shaking out the mats at sixty-three. This was what I used to think about on the Coast; somebody shaking mats and the cat coming home. I can see it today," Baines said, "just as if I was still in Africa. Most days you don't notice what you've got. It's a good life if you don't weaken." He put a penny on the washstand. "When you've dressed, Phil, run and get a *Mail* from the barrow at the corner. I'll be cooking the sausages."

"Sausages?"

"Sausages," Baines said. "We are going to celebrate today. A fair bust."

He celebrated at breakfast, reckless, cracking jokes, unaccountably merry and nervous. It was going to be a long, long day, he kept on coming back to that; for years he had waited for a long day, he had sweated in the damp Coast heat, changed shirts, gone down with fever, lain between the blankets and sweated, all in the hope of this long day, that cat sniffing round in the area, a bit of mist, the mats beaten at 63. He propped the *Mail* in front of the coffee-pot and read pieces aloud.

"Cora Down's been married for the fourth time," Baines said. He was amused, but it was not his idea of a long day. His long day was the Park, watching the riders in the Row, seeing Sir Arthur Stillwater pass beyond the rails. ("He dined with us once in Bo; up from Freetown; he was governor there."), lunch at the Corner House for Philip's sake (he'd have preferred himself a glass of stout and some oysters at the York bar), the Zoo, the long bus ride home in the last summer light: the leaves in the Green Park were beginning to turn and the motors nuzzled out of Berkeley Street with the low sun gently glowing on their wind-screens.

Baines envied no one, not Cora Down, or Sir Arthur Stillwater, or Lord Sandale, who came out on the steps of the Army and Navy and then went back again because he hadn't got anything to do and might as well look at another paper. "I said don't let me see you touch that black again." Baines had led a man's life; everyone on top of the bus pricked their ears when he told Philip all about it.

"Would you have shot him?" Philip asked, and Baines put his head back and tilted his dark respectable manservant's hat to a better angle as the bus swerved round the artillery memorial.

"I wouldn't have thought twice about it. I'd have shot to kill," he boasted, and the bowed figure went by, the steel helmet, the heavy cloak, the down-turned rifle and the folded hands.

"Have you got the revolver?"

"Of course I've got it," Baines said. "Don't I need it with all the burglaries there've been?" This was the Baines whom Philip loved: not Baines singing and carefree, but Baines responsible, Baines behind barriers, living his man's life.

All the buses streamed out from Victoria like a convoy of airplanes to bring Baines home with honor. "Forty blacks under me," and there waiting near the area steps was the proper conventional reward, love at lighting-up time.

"It's your niece," Philip said, recognizing the white mackintosh, but not the happy sleep face. She frightened him like an unlucky number; he nearly told Baines what Mrs. Baines had said: but he didn't want to bother, he wanted to leave things alone.

"Why so it is," Baines said. "I shouldn't wonder if she was going to have a bit of supper with us." But he said they'd play a game, pretend they didn't know her, slip down the area steps. "And here," Baines said, "we are," lay the table, put out the cold sausages, a bottle of beer, a bottle of ginger pop, a flagon of harvest Burgundy. "Everyone his own drink," Baines said. "Run upstairs, Phil, and see if there's been a post."

Philip didn't like the empty house at dusk before the lights went on. He hurried. He wanted to be back with Baines. The hall lay there in quiet and shadow prepared to show him something he didn't want to see. Some letters rustled down, and someone knocked. "Open in the name of the Republic." The tumbrils rolled, the head bobbed in the bloody basket. Knock, knock, and the postman's footsteps going away. Philip gathered the letters. The slit in the door was like the grating in a jeweler's window. He remembered the policeman he had seen peer through. He had said to his nurse, "What's he doing?" and when she said, "He's seeing if everything's all right," his brain immediately filled with images of all that might be wrong.

He ran to the baize door and the stairs. The girl was already there and Baines was kissing her. She leaned breathless against the dresser.

"This is Emmy, Phil."

"There's a letter for you, Baines."

"Emmy," Baines said, "it's from her." But he wouldn't open it. "You bet she's coming back."

"We'll have supper, anyway," Emmy said. "She can't harm that."

"You don't know her," Baines said. "Nothing's safe. Damn it," he said, "I was a man once," and he opened the letter.

"Can I start?" Philip asked, but Baines didn't hear; he presented in his stillness and attention an example of the importance grown-up people attached to the written word: you had to write your thanks, not wait and speak them, as if letters couldn't lie.

But Philip knew better than that, sprawling his thanks across a page to Aunt Alice who had given him a doll he was too old for. Letters could lie all right, but they made the lie permanent: they lay as evidence against you; they made you meaner than the spoken word.

"She's not coming back till tomorrow night," Baines said. He opened the bottles, he pulled up the chairs, he kissed Emmy again against the dresser.

"You oughtn't to," Emmy said, "with the boy here."

"He's got to learn," Baines said, "like the rest of us."

He helped Philip to three sausages. He only took one himself; he said he wasn't hungry; but when Emmy said she wasn't hungry either he stood over her and made her eat. He was timid and rough with her; he made her drink the harvest Burgundy because he said she needed building up; he wouldn't take no for an answer, but when he touched her his hands were light and clumsy too, as if he were afraid to damage something delicate and didn't know how to handle anything so light.

"This is better than milk and biscuits, eh?"

"Yes," Philip said, but he was scared, scared for Baines as much as for himself. He couldn't help wondering at every bite, at every draught of the ginger pop, what Mrs. Baines would say if she ever learnt of this meal; he couldn't imagine it, there was a depth of bitterness and rage in Mrs. Baines you couldn't sound.

He said, "She won't be coming back tonight?" but you could tell by the way they immediately understood him that she wasn't really away at all; she was there in the basement with them driving them to longer drinks and louder talk, biding her time for the right cutting word. Baines wasn't really happy; he was only watching happiness from close to instead of from far away.

"No," he said, "she'll not be back till late tomorrow."

He couldn't keep his eyes off happiness; he'd played around as much as other men, he kept on reverting to the Coast as if to excuse himself for his innocence; he wouldn't have been so innocent if he'd lived his life in London, so innocent when it came to tenderness.

"If it was you, Emmy," he said, looking at the white dresser,

the scrubbed chairs, "this'd be like a home." Already the room was not quite so harsh; there was a little dust in corners, the silver needed a final polish, the morning's paper lay untidily on a chair. "You'd better go to bed, Phil; it's been a long day."

They didn't leave him to find his own way up through the dark shrouded house; they went with him, turning on lights, touching each other's fingers on the switches; floor after floor they drove the night back; they spoke softly among the covered chairs; they watched him undress, they didn't make him wash or clean his teeth, they saw him into bed and lit his night-light and left his door ajar.

He could hear their voices on the stairs, friendly, like the guests he heard at dinner-parties when they moved down to the hall, saying good night. They belonged; wherever they were they made a home. He heard a door open and a clock strike, he heard their voices for a long while, so that he felt they were not so far away and he was safe.

The voices didn't dwindle, they simply went out, and he could be sure that they were still somewhere not far from him, silent together in one of the many empty rooms, growing sleepy together as he grew sleepy after the long day.

He just had time to sigh faintly with satisfaction, because this too perhaps had been life, before he slept and the inevitable terrors of sleep came round him: a man with a tricolor hat beat at the door of His Majesty's service, a bleeding head lay on the kitchen table in a basket, and the Siberian wolves crept closer. He was bound hand and foot and could not move; they leapt round him breathing heavily; he opened his eyes and Mrs. Baines was there, her gray untidy hair in threads over his face, her black hat askew. A loose hairpin fell on the pillow and one musty thread brushed his mouth.

"Where are they?" she whispered. "Where are they?"

IV

Philip watched her in terror. Mrs. Baines was out of breath as if she had been searching all the empty rooms, looking under loose covers.

With her untidy gray hair and her black dress buttoned to her throat, her gloves of black cotton she was so like the witches of his dreams that he didn't dare speak. There was a stale smell in her breath.

Philip waited.

"She's here," Mrs. Baines said "you can't deny she's here." Her face was simultaneously marked with cruelty and misery; she wanted to "do things" to people, but she suffered all the time. It would have done her good to

scream, but she daren't do that; it would warn them.

She came ingratiatingly back to the bed where Philip lay rigid on his back and whispered, "I haven't forgotten the Meccano set. You shall have it tomorrow, Master Philip. We've got secrets together, haven't we? Just tell me where they are."

He couldn't speak. Fear held him as firmly as any nightmare. She said, "Tell Mrs. Baines, Master Philip. You love your Mrs. Baines, don't you?" That was too much; he couldn't speak, but he could move his mouth in terrified denial, wince away from her dusty image.

She whispered, coming closer to him, "Such deceit. I'll tell your father. I'll settle with you myself when I've found them. You'll smart; I'll see you smart."

Then immediately she was still, listening. A board had creaked on the floor below, and a moment later, while she stooped listening above his bed, there came the whispers of two people who were happy and sleepy together after a long day. The night-light stood beside the mirror and Mrs. Baines could see bitterly there her own reflection, misery and cruelty wavering in the glass, age and dust and nothing to hope for. She sobbed without tears, a dry, breathless sound; but her cruelty was a kind of pride which kept her going; it was her best quality, she would have been merely pitiable without it.

She went out of the door on tiptoe, feeling her way across the landing, going so softly down the stairs that no one behind a shut door could hear her. Then there was complete silence again; Philip could move; he raised his knees; he sat up in bed; he wanted to die. It wasn't fair, the walls were down again between his world and theirs; but this time it was something worse than merriment that the grown people made him share; a passion moved in the house he recognized but could not understand.

It wasn't fair, but he owed Baines everything: the Zoo, the ginger pop, the bus ride home. Even the supper called on his loyalty. But he was frightened; he was touching something he touched in dreams; the bleeding head, the wolves, the knock, knock, knock. Life fell on him with savagery: you couldn't blame him if he never faced it again in sixty years.

He got out of bed, carefully from habit put on his bedroom slippers, and tiptoed to the door: it wasn't quite dark on the landing below because the curtains had been taken down for the cleaners and the light from the street came in through the tall windows.

Mrs. Baines had her hand on the glass doorknob; she was very

carefully turning it; he screamed, "Baines, Baines."

Mrs. Baines turned and saw him cowering in his pajamas by the banisters; he was helpless, more helpless even than Baines, and cruelty grew at the sight of him and drove her up the stairs. The nightmare was on him again and he couldn't move; he hadn't any more courage left forever; he'd spent it all, had been allowed no time to let it grow, no years of gradual hardening; he couldn't even scream.

But the first cry had brought Baines out of the best spare bedroom and he moved quicker than Mrs. Baines. She hadn't reached the top of the stairs before he'd caught her round the waist. She drove her black cotton gloves at his face and he bit her hand. He hadn't time to think, he fought her savagely like a stranger, but she fought back with knowledgeable hate.

She was going to teach them all and it didn't really matter whom she began with; they had all deceived her; but the old image in the glass was by her side, telling her she must be dignified, she wasn't young enough to yield her dignity; she could beat his face, but she must not bite; she could push, but she mustn't kick.

Age and dust and nothing to hope for were her handicaps. She went over the banisters in a flurry of black clothes and fell into the hall; she lay before the front door like a sack of coals which should have gone down the area into the basement. Philip saw; Emmy saw; she sat down suddenly in the doorway of the best spare bedroom with her eyes open as if she were too tired to stand any longer. Baines went slowly down into the hall.

It wasn't hard for Philip to escape; they'd forgotten him completely; he went down the back, the servants' stairs because Mrs. Baines was in the hall; he didn't understand what she was doing lying there; like the startling pictures in a book no one had read to him, the things he didn't understand terrified him.

The whole house had been turned over to the grown-up world; he wasn't safe in the night nursery; their passions had flooded it. The only thing he could do was to get away, by the back stair, and up through the area, and never come back. You didn't think of the cold, of the need of food and sleep; for an hour it would seem quite possible to escape from people forever.

He was wearing pajamas and bedroom slippers when he came up into the square, but there was no one to see him. It was that hour of the evening in a residential district when everyone is at the theatre or at home. He climbed over the iron railings into the little garden: the plane-trees spread their large pale palms be-

tween him and the sky. It might have been an illimitable forest into which he had escaped.

He crouched behind a trunk and the wolves retreated; it seemed to him between the little iron seat and the tree-trunk that no one would ever find him again. A kind of embittered happiness and self-pity made him cry; he was lost; there wouldn't be any more secrets to keep; he surrendered responsibility once and for all. Let grown-up people keep to their world and he would keep to his, safe in the small garden between the plane-trees. "In the lost childhood of Judas Christ was betrayed"; you could almost see the small unformed face hardening into the deep dilettante selfishness of age.

Presently the door of 48 opened and Baines looked this way and that; then he signaled with his hand and Emmy came; it was as if they were only just in time for a train, they hadn't a chance of saying good-bye; she went quickly by, like a face at a window swept past the platform, pale and unhappy and not wanting to go.

Baines went in again and shut the door; the light was lit in the basement, and a policeman walked round the square looking into the areas. You could tell how many families were at home by the lights behind the first-floor curtains.

Philip explored the garden: it didn't take long: a twenty-yard square of bushes and plane-trees, two iron seats and a gravel path, a padlocked gate at either end, a scuffle of old leaves. But he couldn't stay: something stirred in the bushes and two illuminated eyes peered out at him like a Siberian wolf, and he thought how terrible it would be if Mrs. Baines found him there. He'd have no time to climb the railings; she'd seize him from behind.

He left the square at the unfashionable end and was immediately among the fish-and-chip shops, the little stationers selling Bagatelle, among the accommodation addresses and the dingy hotels with open doors. There were few people about because the pubs were open, but a blowzy woman carrying a parcel called out to him across the street and the commissionaire outside a cinema would have stopped him if he hadn't crossed the road.

He went deeper: you could go farther and lose yourself more completely here than among the plane-trees. On the fringe of the square he was in danger of being stopped and taken back: it was obvious where he belonged: but as he went deeper he lost the marks of his origin. It was a warm night: any child in those free-living parts might be expected to play truant from bed. He found a kind of camaraderie even among grown-up people; he

might have been a neighbor's child as he went quickly by but they weren't going to tell on him, they'd been young once themselves.

He picked up a protective coating of dust from the pavements, of smuts from the trains which passed along the backs in a spray of fire. Once he was caught in a knot of children running away from something or somebody, laughing as they ran; he was whirled with them round a turning and abandoned with a sticky fruit-drop in his hand.

He couldn't have been more lost; but he hadn't the stamina to keep on. At first he feared that someone would stop him; after an hour he hoped that someone would. He couldn't find his way back, and in any case he was afraid of arriving home alone; he was afraid of Mrs. Baines, more afraid than he had ever been. Baines was his friend, but something had happened which gave Mrs. Baines all the power.

He began to loiter on purpose to be noticed, but no one noticed him. Families were having a last breather on the door-steps, the refuse bins had been put out and bits of cabbage stalks soiled his slippers. The air was full of voices, but he was cut off; these people were strangers and would always now be strangers; they were marked by Mrs. Baines and he shied away from them into a deep class-consciousness.

He had been afraid of policemen, but now he wanted one to take him home; even Mrs. Baines could do nothing against a policeman. He sidled past a constable who was directing traffic, but he was too busy to pay him any attention. Philip sat down against a wall and cried.

It hadn't occurred to him that that was the easiest way, that all you had to do was to surrender, to show you were beaten and accept kindness . . .

It was lavished on him at once by two women and a pawnbroker. Another policeman appeared, a young man with a sharp incredulous face. He looked as if he noted everything he saw in pocketbooks and drew conclusions. A woman offered to see Philip home, but he didn't trust her: she wasn't a match for Mrs. Baines immobile in the hall. He wouldn't give his address; he said he was afraid to go home. He had his way; he got his protection.

"I'll take him to the station," the policeman said, and holding him awkwardly by the hand (he wasn't married; he had his career to make) he led him around the corner, up the stone steps into the little bare overheated room where Justice waited.

V

Justice waited behind a wooden counter on a high stool;

it wore a heavy mustache; it was kindly and had six children ("three of them nippers like yourself"); it wasn't really interested in Philip, but it pretended to be, it wrote the address down and sent a constable to fetch a glass of milk. But the young constable was interested; he had a nose for things.

"Your home's on the telephone, I suppose," Justice said. "We'll ring them up and say you are safe. They'll fetch you very soon. What's your name, sonny?"

"Philip."

"Your other name."

"I haven't got another name." He didn't want to be fetched; he wanted to be taken home by someone who would impress even Mrs. Baines. The constable watched him, watched the way he drank the milk, watched him when he winced away from questions.

"What made you run away? Playing truant, eh?"

"I don't know."

"You oughtn't to do it, young fellow. Think how anxious your father and mother will be."

"They are away."

"Well, your nurse."

"I haven't got one."

"Who looks afer you, then?" That question went home. Philip saw Mrs. Baines coming up the stairs at him, the heap of black cotton in the hall. He began to cry.

"Now, now, now," the sergeant said. He didn't know what to do; he wished his wife were with him; even a policewoman might have been useful.

"Don't you think it's funny," the constable said, "that there hasn't been an inquiry?"

"They think he's tucked up in bed."

"You are scared, aren't you?" the constable said. "What scared you?"

"I don't know."

"Somebody hurt you?"

"No."

"He's had bad dreams," the sergeant said. "Thought the house was on fire, I expect. I've brought up six of them. Rose is due back. She'll take him home."

"I want to go home with you," Philip said; he tried to smile at the constable, but the deceit was immature and unsuccessful.

"I'd better go," the constable said. "There may be something wrong."

"Nonsense," the sergeant said. "It's a woman's job. Tact is what you need. Here's Rose. Pull up your stockings, Rose. You're a disgrace to the Force. I've got a job of work for you."

Rose shambled in: black cotton stockings drooping over her boots, a gawky Girl Guide manner, a hoarse hostile voice. "More tarts, I suppose."

"No, you've got to see this young man home." She looked at him owlishly.

"I won't go with her," Philip said. He began to cry again. "I don't like her."

"More of that womanly charm, Rose," the sergeant said. The telephone rang on his desk. He lifted the receiver. "What? What's that?" he said. "Number forty-eight? You've got a doctor?" He put his hand over the telephone mouth. "No wonder this nipper wasn't reported," he said. "They've been too busy. An accident. Woman slipped on the stairs."

"Serious?" the constable asked. The sergeant mouthed at him; you didn't mention the word death before a child (didn't he know? he had six of them), you made noises in the throat, you grimaced, a complicated shorthand for a word of only five letters anyway.

"You'd better go, after all," he said, "and make a report. The doctor's there."

Rose shambled from the stove; pink apply-dapply cheeks, loose stockings. She stuck her hands behind her. Her large morgue-like mouth was full of blackened teeth. "You told me to take him and now just because something interesting . . . I don't expect justice from a man . . ."

"Who's at the house?" the constable asked.

"The butler."

"You don't think," the constable said, "he saw . . ."

"Trust me," the sergeant said. "I've brought up six. I know 'em through and through. You can't teach me anything about children."

"He seemed scared about something."

"Dreams," the sergeant said.

"What name?"

"Baines."

"This Mr. Baines," the constable said to Philip, "you like him, eh? He's good to you?"

They were trying to get something out of him; he was suspicious of the whole roomful of them; he said "yes" without conviction because he was afraid at any moment of more responsibilities, more secrets.

"And Mrs. Baines?"

"Yes."

They consulted together by the desk; Rose was hoarsely aggrieved; she was like a female impersonator, she bore her womanhood with an unnatural emphasis even while she scorned it in her creased stockings and her weather-exposed face.

The charcoal shifted in the stove; the room was overheated in the mild late summer evening. A notice on the wall described a body found in the Thames, or rather the body's clothes: wool vest, wool pants, wool shirt with blue stripes, size ten boots, blue serge suit worn at the elbows, fifteen and a half celluloid collar. They couldn't find anything to say about the body, ex-

cept its measurements, it was just an ordinary body.

"Come along," the constable said. He was interested, he was glad to be going, but he couldn't help being embarrassed by his company, a small boy in pajamas. His nose smelt something, he didn't know what, but he smarted at the sight of the amusement they caused. The pubs had closed and the streets were full again of men making as long a day of it as they could.

He hurried through the less frequented streets, chose the darker pavements, wouldn't loiter, and Philip wanted more and more to loiter, pulling at his hand, dragging with his feet. He dreaded the sight of Mrs. Baines waiting in the hall: he knew now that she was dead. The sergeant's mouthings had conveyed that; but she wasn't buried, she wasn't out of sight, he was going to see a dead person in the hall when the door opened.

The light was on in the basement, and to his relief the constable made for the area steps. Perhaps he wouldn't have to see Mrs. Baines at all. The constable knocked on the door because it was too dark to see the bell, and Baines answered.

He stood there in the doorway of the neat bright basement room and you could see the sad complacent plausible sentence he had prepared wither at the sight of Philip; he hadn't expected Philip to return like that in the policeman's company. He had been thinking all over again; he wasn't a deceptive man; if it hadn't been for Emmy he would have been quite ready to let the truth lead him where it would.

"Mr. Baines?" the constable asked.

He nodded; he hadn't found the right words, he was daunted by the shrewd knowing face, the sudden appearance of Philip there.

"This little boy from here?"

"Yes," Baines said.

Philip could tell that there was a message he was trying to convey, but he shut his mind to it. He loved Baines, but Baines had involved him in secrets, in fears he didn't understand. The glowing morning thought, "This is life," had become under Baines's tuition the repugnant memory, "that was life": the musty hair across the mouth, the breathless cruel tortured inquiry, "Where are they," the heap of black cotton tipped into the hall. That was what happened when you loved: you got involved; and Philip extricated himself from life, from love, from Baines with a merciless egotism.

There had been things between them, but he laid them low, as a retreating army cuts the wires, destroys the bridges. In the abandoned country you may leave much that is dear—a morning in the Park, an ice at a corner house,

sausages for supper—but more is concerned in the retreat than temporary losses. There are old people who, as the tractors wheel away, implore to be taken, but you can't risk the rearguard for their sake: a whole prolonged retreat from life, from care, from human relationships is involved.

"The doctor's here," Baines said. He nodded at the door, moistened his mouth, kept his eyes on Philip, begging for something like a dog you can't understand. "There's nothing to be done. She slipped on these stone basement stairs. I was in here. I heard her fall."

He wouldn't look at the notebook, at the constable's tiny spidery writing which got a terrible lot on one page.

"Did the boy see anything?"

"He can't have done. I thought he was in bed. Hadn't he better go up? It's a shocking thing. Oh," Baines said, losing control, "it's a shocking thing for a child."

"She's through there?" the constable asked.

"I haven't moved her an inch," Baines said.

"He'd better then—"

"Go up the area and through the hall," Baines said and again he begged dumbly like a dog: one more secret, keep this secret, do this for old Baines, he won't ask another.

"Come along," the constable said. "I'll see you up to bed. You're a gentleman; you must come in the proper way through the front door like the master should. Or will you go along with him, Mr. Baines, while I see the doctor?"

"Yes," Baines said, "I'll go."

He came across the room to Philip, begging, begging, all the way with his soft old stupid expression: this is Baines, the old Coaster; what about a palm-oil chop, eh?; a man's life; forty black men; never used a gun; I tell you I couldn't help loving them: it wasn't what we call love, nothing we could understand. The messages flickered out from the large posts at the border, imploring, beseeching, reminding: this is your old friend Baines; what about an eleven's; a glass of ginger pop won't do you any harm; sausages; a long day. But the wires were cut, the messages just faded out into the enormous vacancy of the neat scrubbed room in which there had never been a place where a man could hide his secrets.

"Come along, Phil, it's bedtime. We'll just go up the steps . . ." Tap, tap, tap, at the telegraph; you may get through, you can't tell, somebody may mend the right wire. "And in at the front door."

"No," Philip said, "no. I won't go. You can't make me go. I'll fight. I won't see her."

The constable turned on them

quickly. "What's that? Why won't you go?"

"She's in the hall," Philip said. "I know she's in the hall. And she's dead. I won't see her."

"You moved her then?" the constable said to Baines. "All the way down here? You've been lying, eh? That means you had to tidy up . . . Were you alone?"

"Emmy, Emmy," Philip said.

He wasn't going to keep any more secrets: he was going to finish once and for all with everything, with Baines and Mrs. Baines and the grown-up life beyond him; it wasn't his business and never, never again, he decided, would he share their confidences and companionship.

"It was all Emmy's fault," he protested with a quaver which reminded Baines that after all he was only a child; it had been hopeless to expect help there, he was a child; he didn't understand what it all meant; he couldn't read this shorthand of terror; he'd had a long day and he was tired out. You could see him dropping asleep where he stood against the dresser, dropping back into the comfortable nursery peace. You couldn't blame him. When he woke in the morning, he'd hardly remember a thing.

"Out with it," the constable said, addressing Baines with professional ferocity, "who is she?" just as the old man sixty years later startled his secretary, his only watcher, asking, "Who is she? Who is she?" dropping lower and lower into death, passing on the way perhaps the image of Baines: Baines hopeless, Baines letting his head drop, Baines "coming clean."

HAVE YOU MADE THE BIG DISCOVERY

THE SAINT DETECTIVE MAGAZINE IS NOW A MONTHLY

death on little cat's feet

by . . . Margaret Manners

Time and the Universe were the chief concerns of Horace Dilby. But murder fascinated him too.

NO ONE LOOKING at Horace Dilby would ever have supposed that he was engaged in a struggle with Time and the Universe. Horace had a round face, a stiff nervous smile, a chubby figure and thinning hair. His outer existence was a simple pattern of dull and trivial routine. A timetable. His inner existence was a rather more complicated pattern of equally trivial eccentricities. Another timetable.

Horace was obsessed by what he called *patterns*. Life was a chaos of intermingling patterns like the designs in an oriental rug. But there was one difference. If you stared at a rug you could often penetrate its meaning, find its order. In life you were a part of an unfathomable design, a wiggle perhaps in someone else's maelstrom. You never knew where you were, nor when the patterns would whirl you into complete confusion. Horace allowed himself to be haunted, terrified, by this idea.

He had a system for keeping his fear at bay. A poor, contrived little system, perhaps, but it car-

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You may think for a moment, as you start this story, that it strayed in some quite miraculous fashion from the pages of the SAINT'S *companion magazine,* FANTASTIC UNIVERSE. *But the illusion will vanish quickly enough, we promise you, when you're caught up in as thrilling a murder mystery as ever we've brought you in wrappings just a little off trail. To Miss Manners go our congratulations on a superb job in the realm of suspense.*

ried him safely from minute to minute. And if it had the rigor of a strait jacket, that rigor was welcomed for the security it afforded. For Horace made his own pattern and followed it with only occasional mishaps day after day. How could you be a blind pawn in the hands of chance if you were running like a train on familiar tracks, stopping at designated stations, leaving and arriving on time?

The psychology text books he had read dealt with cases like his at great length. Horace did not like their point of view at all. He preferred his own theory about patterns and chance, it gave his feeling of inadequacy an almost cosmic dimension.

Yes, his theory was fine and he was proud of it. It was his practice that was ridiculous. The routine was petty. There was nothing in the least heroic about it. He consoled himself with the thought that the heroic was the enemy of habit, and could therefore be omitted without shame.

There had to be elements of difficulty, of course. Things could not be too easy, there were rules to the game. What he lacked in the heroic, Horace made up in the intricate.

Since childhood he had been a step-counter, a fence-toucher, a pavement crack-skipper. It was only natural that step-counting and minute-watching should be the basis of his timetable, since Space and Time are of the essence in all timetables.

So it went. He left the house at precisely the same minute every morning. Knew the shortest route by steps to the subway station; this was quite a trick, a hurrying crowd could throw you out in no time. He always crossed the threshold of his bachelor apartment at the same time every evening.

Then there was the feat of picking up a newspaper on the way home. It had to be a *Tribune* and one had to pick it up without being noticed from the subway seat and carry it off quite casually. He threw it away afterwards. This was just a test that added the element of risk, copies of the *Tribune* were not always available at that hour.

Since Horace was afraid of strangers he would force himself to speak to one stranger a day and exact a smile from the chosen face. This usually took the tame form of bumping into someone, apologizing and receiving the acknowledgement of this civility. But you couldn't just bump anyone who conveniently offered. You had to decide on your quarry in advance, stalk him, bump him, and get the formula in return. "That's all right," or "Quite all right!" and, of course, the smile.

Then there was the routine identified by Horace as "Smith and the Water-cooler." He had worked out the shortest route to

the office cooler and it was his custom to beat Smith to it every time. He always stacked the cards against himself. Smith had to be on his feet in motion before Horace could rise from his place, and then without the least appearance of hurrying and without giving Smith any reason to suspect what he was up to, he had to beat him.

When Horace accomplished his daily quota of patterns he felt safe, or at least he felt that he had paid in advance for a margin of safety. When he failed life was empty and frightening.

Tonight life was empty.

In the first place it was Saturday. Horace dreaded Saturday nights. Monday was followed by Tuesday, Tuesday by Wednesday. But after Saturday came that break in routine, that space that had to be safely filled before the next Monday.

Besides Saturday nights were unpleasant in his apartment. The woman upstairs almost always gave a party, and, while generally speaking, it was all right to have a little fun on Saturday nights, the woman upstairs went too far. She started early and ended early, early in the morning. The noise and vibration gave Horace a headache, but he never had the courage to complain. He longed to call the police and he often planned what he would say, but his indignation froze in a solid lump in his throat before his hand even touched the telephone.

But this Saturday night was the worst that he remembered. Everything had gone wrong all day. That morning he had been jostled into the greatest number of steps from subway to office that he had ever taken. The man he had planned to bump had escaped in the crowd. And *twice* Smith had beaten him to the water cooler. He had been so shaken by these failures that he had made an error in his accounts, and had worked overtime finding it.

When he left the office at last the heavy fall dusk was already shrouding the city. The world seemed an alarming and hostile place. There was only one thing to do. He had to try to undo or redeem the day before it was lost. He knew from experience that one could sometimes balance a failure, but for this particular case strong measures would be needed. It was necessary to accomplish something especially distasteful and difficult within a given time.

He decided to allow exactly 37 minutes for his home journey. And to complicate the timing he would walk part of the way. He would also stop at a pet shop and buy some catnip for Ginger. Ginger was a large and very dignified cat who visited him by means of his bedroom firescape every evening at exactly the same

time. Ginger was intelligent and had been easy to condition.

Horace often wondered if it had not been Ginger who had conditioned him. The saucer of milk and the liver had certainly been Ginger's idea. Catnip, however, was an intoxication that Horace allowed only on rare occasions. Ginger under its influence lost all dignity and became a clawing, rolling, chewing, frankly inebriated cat. Tonight was definitely a night for catnip, Horace thought. One of them was entitled to an intoxicant and as he did not drink—

Anyway it would go very nicely with the party upstairs.

But all that seemed too easy. There must be something . . .

Finally he made up his mind. He would leave the subway three stops ahead of his station and walk home through the park along the river. He chose it because he was timid and did not like dark lonely places. If he could manage all that within the given time he felt that honor would be satisfied. With a glance at his watch Mr. Dilby left the starting post.

Buying the catnip took more time than he intended. The woman in the pet shop was a chronic talker and she rattled on, her words an avalanche of pebbles rolling down an endless hill. He felt the minutes ticking away, the beat of his heart, the pulse of life itself.

When he got away almost ten of his precious minutes had leaked into the past.

As soon as he entered the subway car he saw the newspaper, a *Tribune,* neatly folded, and an empty seat beside it! He almost lost the seat to another passenger, but slid into it with a desperate wriggle and a sheepish smile. After settling himself he glanced around and let his hand steal out toward the paper. At that instant, without a word or a glance, the man who was seated on the other side of the paper reached out and took it. Horace had to clench his hand to keep from tearing it from the despoiler and beating him over the head with it.

He regretted now that he had attempted the paper at all. It had not, properly speaking, been included in his improvised plans for the evening. To have ignored the temptation would have been better than to succumb and fail.

Much disheartened, he left the train three stations ahead, crossed the street and walked the few blocks toward the river. The idea of giving up the whole idea and just going home presented itself and was quickly rejected. That would be cheating and Horace never cheated.

It was dark now, a chilly evening, heavy with damp. The park loomed in mist like an etching in a Victorian Gothic novel. The lamps along the paths were

dimmed by the thick atmosphere into golden globules of haze floating overhead. Dark shadows crouched everywhere.

Horace remembered his Aunt Henrietta, the spartan, bosomless woman who had raised him. She had never permitted a night light and he had been afraid of the dark. It was no small act of courage to plunge into the park remembering the night terrors of his childhood.

The air was cooler there. He forced himself not to walk too quickly. It was almost as bad to be ahead of time as to be late. His footsteps sounded lonely and strange echoing on the path so he stepped on the edge of the turf and walked there.

Suddenly he was exasperated with himself. Why couldn't he be like other people and just go home? Why did he have to . . . ?

He was walking in the massed shelter of a line of trees when he heard the approaching footsteps. A few feet ahead the path was clear and treeless. There was a lamp and beneath it a wire refuse basket. Then abruptly the path turned and disappeared into more trees.

The man appeared suddenly at the turn of the path and paused. Horace could see him like a figure on a stage caught in the soft spotlight of the lamp. He was tall and seemed to be well-dressed. His hat brim shaded his face and he carried a rolled up newspaper. As Horace watched, the man glanced around and dropped the newspaper into the refuse basket. Then he came on.

Horace stepped forward and onto the path quickly. Better pass in the open under the light. It would look funny walking on the grass.

They met and passed each other a few yards from the trees. Horace kept his eyes down. Was the other watching him? He glanced sideways and caught the needle-flash of sharp eyes probing. What *was* the matter with him tonight? Why should he think that there was something sinister about the man?

He glanced back nervously but the unknown had already been swallowed up by the trees. Directly beside him was the wire basket. The rolled up newspaper lay on top. And it was a *Tribune!* Impossible to resist the impulse. Horace grabbed it and walked on.

He felt foolish and slyly triumphant. But as he glanced at the thing he carried his fastidious nature was offended. The paper seemed to have something in it, a piece of string had been wound round it to hold it together. He ought to throw it away at once. It might contain any number of ignominious bits better left hidden. Perhaps, the remains of a meal prepared in a non-housekeeping room and

smuggled out past a suspicious landlady.

Really! This was the silliest thing he had ever done. Suppose the man had seen him? Horace blushed. Yet he could not let the thing go. The mechanism of a day's thwarted patterns was working against reason. He clutched the paper defiantly. He would carry it as far as his house and then dispose of it.

And then he remembered, or thought he remembered, that after the man had reached the trees he had heard no footsteps. That might mean that he had been standing there in the shadows watching. Horace caught his breath and walked faster. Was he being followed? He told himself that the idea was ridiculous and almost believed it.

With passionate relief he saw the exit path that would bring him out closest to his street and plunged along it toward the lights and the traffic.

The park and its fears had been defeated.

He looked at his watch. Four and one half minutes left. He walked very fast indeed.

Several houses before his own he fumbled for his keys. By the time he reached the vestibule he had the mailbox key ready. This was part of the ritual, to skip it would be to cheat. No letter. Now, up the stairs . . . Damn! The newspaper was still tucked under his arm. If he went out into the street again he would be late but he didn't want the thing in his apartment.

At the back of the hall where the stairs went up there was a door into the back area. It took him a split second to open the door and deposit the paper in one of the empty ash cans that were lined up there.

He crossed his threshold exactly one minute late. It had all been for nothing.

Crossing the tiny foyer he entered the living room and flipped the switch on the standard lamp in the corner. To his annoyance it did not go on and he had to light others. Of course, he had unplugged the lamp yesterday because the cord was so badly frayed. He'd have to fix that. A a good task for that evening. The party was in progress upstairs and he knew reading would be out of the question.

As he looked round the simple comfortable room he felt tired and defeated. The upholstered chair, the secretary, the huge bookcase, the vase of water plants on the small table—tonight it looked cold and unfriendly, less like a sanctuary than a prison. The light perhaps. Not having the tall lamp made all the difference. He'd *have* to fix it tonight.

Before he could remove his hat or coat the doorbell rang.

A mistake, of course. He was not expecting anything. Children, perhaps.

The bell rang again, long and hard.

With a sigh Horace pressed the buzzer, opened his door and waited.

The man who mounted the stairs came straight toward him. "Mr. Dilby?"

"I'm afraid . . ." Horace began.

And then he was pushed, *pushed* back into his apartment. The door shut behind them. He opened his mouth to protest, and stood there, frozen. A gun! Pointing at him!

He was too dazed to dodge the hand. It swept his hat to the floor in one contemptuous movement and then struck him across the face.

His topcoat was opened. A hand went inside, patted his pockets, felt around the belt of his trousers, slapped his legs.

A voice said, "Where is it? You didn't have much time. Where is it?"

Horace tried to understand what was happening. The face thrust itself at him venomously. It was a sharp face, a thin wedge, two profiles stuck together. Pale blue eyes, feverishly bright, flickered with anger. It was . . . it was the man from the park!

Horace's knees melted under him.

"Sit down!" He was pushed into a chair. "We'll talk first, then you can give me what I came for."

But that could only be the newspaper! And why was the man looking up at the ceiling that way? Oh yes, the party, it was getting noisier.

The intruder seemed to be pleased. "That racket will help," he said. "Did you know that a cushion properly used will muffle the sound of a shot? Tell me, Mr. Dilby, why did Harlan hire you to wait there in the park?"

"I wasn't hired," Horace stammered. "It . . . it was a momentary aberration . . . I was just coming home."

"I'm not an idiot." The voice was sharper now. "I saw you. I followed you."

"How . . . I mean, how do you know my name?"

"I saw which mailbox you opened. I'm not a professional gunman, Mr. Dilby, but I can shoot and I'm desperate. I am not sentimental about humanity and I am not easily fooled. Try to understand what I'm saying. Are you listening? Do you follow me?"

Horace nodded.

"When I came in just now I was rough with you, that was nothing, just an introduction. I want you to know I'm the boss. I need what you took in the park, and I need it quickly. I also intend to find out what you have to do with Harlan."

"Nothing—I assure you," Horace said quickly. A fierce look silenced him.

"I know Harlan didn't need you to watch me. He already had the proof he wanted. That's why I had to . . . arrange for his silence. Another day or two and the money would have been replaced, the books fixed up, but he found out. He was going to hand me over to the police."

The blue eyes glistened unpleasantly. "I was his superior in every way, but I had to work for him. He had everything and did not know how to use it . . . a miser. Even his wife had to beg for every penny. He treated me like dirt. I had it all worked out. She was as bad as he was in her own way. She deserved no consideration. Why did you interfere? Why were you there? Harlan couldn't have known."

One thought struck Mr. Dilby. He was filled and horror. He couldn't tell where the *Tribune* was. As long as it was hidden the man would be reluctant to kill him, but after . . . He tried to think of something to say.

"I wasn't waiting for you," he protested. "I wasn't. It was just chance." Just chance! And to Horace Dilby chance represented all unknown peril and chaos. He shivered violently.

"Cold, Mr. Dilby?" There was mockery and contempt in the voice. "Never mind. I have the answer. Though I certainly would never have picked you as a man to spy on other men's wives."

Horace was stupefied. "Other men's wives?"

"It's obvious. Harlan didn't need to have me watched. He didn't know I'd be in the park or why. If he had he would have safeguarded himself against . . ." There was a short pause. "But he did know that his wife walked the dog there every evening. He sent you to watch her. He was jealous, everyone knew it. When I showed up you thought I was leaving a warning for her, perhaps you thought that I was the man she was to meet."

"Oh, no! You're wrong. I did not know who you were."

"Didn't you? Harlan had a few snapshots of me taken last summer. I can just see him showing them to you. 'That's my secretary, Willet. My wife may even be meeting him.' He didn't trust me. He didn't trust anyone. Oh, you recognized me all right."

Willet stood up and pushed back his chair. "No matter. You took what I left there. You came between me and my safety. Now you can give it back to me. Where is it?"

Horace was silent.

"Fool!" Willet said. "I'll find it. It's here somewhere. Stand up!"

Horace stood up. It did not occur to him to fight, to throw himself on the hand that held the gun. He was only too painfully aware of his limitations.

"Face the wall! Keep your

hands above your head! If you move I'll kill you."

Horace did as he was told and the search began. What would happen when bedroom, kitchen, everything had been searched? His arms started to ache and he thought of physical pain and his cowardice when faced with a visit to the dentist. He didn't realize that Ginger was there until he felt the soft rubbing against his ankle.

"Meow!" Ginger said loudly.

Willet stopped opening drawers. "What's that?"

"Just the cat," Horace said. "He came through the bedroom door. He always comes at the same time and I . . ."

Ginger complained again.

"He wants his milk. If I could just go to the kitchen, please?"

"The kitchen, Dilby? Lead the way, then."

But he wasn't permitted to give Ginger his milk. He had to stand as before, facing the wall, his hands high.

The cat meowed bitterly. Horace felt the inexorable push of his timetable but dared not move. He heard the pots and pans being knocked about, drawers opened, cupboards rifled.

Stillness. And then a soft hissing. A small explosion as the pilot on the stove ignited the gas.

Willet's voice reached him, quiet, even, without anger, without pity. "You can use a stove for more than cooking, my obstinate hero. I can easily make you tell me. Why not save time and spare us both a very shocking experience."

It had come at last. The threat of pain. Cold sweat covered his body. The moisture ran down his raised arms. He swayed.

"Rest your arms a minute," Willet said.

Horace lowered them and turned, facing Willet across an opened drawer of the cabinet. He tried to bring the swimming haze into focus. Odds and ends. A few tools. A flashlight. Some fuses. Horace stared at them. The thought of darkness came to him. Not the darkness of death, but the darkness of power failure. If only . . . But he must say something. Must seem to be willing to . . .

"Suppose," he said shakily, "that I had taken something you left in the park."

Willet smiled.

"But *if* I had, you understand? If I gave it back to you you'd kill me before you left."

"Don't be foolish," Willet said impatiently. "I have no particular wish to kill you."

Horace was not fooled. He knew the difference between wish and necessity. But if Willet thought he was weakening perhaps he would let him feed Ginger. He did not know why feeding Ginger was important or how it would help. He only knew that to perform the accus-

tomed task would perhaps wipe out some of the fear, help him to think.

"But tomorrow or the next day a crime would be discovered. I'd know when I read the papers. How can you overlook that? If you could convince me that I'd still be alive after . . ."

"I'll tie you up." Willet was eager to deceive him. "Before you were found and released I'd be out of the country using another name."

"I don't know, "Horace said weakly. "How can I trust you?"

Willet's eyes narrowed. "You have to take that chance," he said.

Ginger meowed plaintively.

"May I feed him?" Horace begged, reaching toward the refrigerator.

Willet's hand shot out, opened the refrigerator. He inspected everything even the ice cube trays. Then he slammed it shut again.

"It will only take a second," Horace pleaded. "Just a little milk."

"No!" The bright fanatic eyes were like polished stones.

"But why not? It can't do any harm."

"You can't feed the damn cat because this gun says you can't. You do what I say, only what I say. Understand?"

"But that's ridiculous!" Horace couldn't control himself. He had submitted to terror because there was nothing in him to oppose to terror. Now every nerve in his body was exasperated by this senseless prohibition.

"You're fond of that cat, aren't you?"

"Not particularly," Horace said quickly, too quickly. "He's not even my cat. It's just habit. I feed him every night."

Ginger stalked between them his tail held high, eager for the saucer which always followed the opening and closing of the refrigerator.

Without any change of expression Willet kicked the cat.

Horace's cry was an echo of Ginger's.

"How could you?" Tears of rage blinded him. "He trusts me. He's conditioned to expect kindness here. Don't you realize . . . ? It's bewildering, worse than frightening for a conditioned animal to be faced with the unexpected. It's more cruel than physical pain . . . it's . . ."

"How well you understand that cat," Willet said. "Well, how about it? Do you give it to me? Or is Ginger to get some more of the unexpected?"

"Give me one minute," Horace heard himself say.

He bent and coaxed Ginger to come out from under the chair where he had crawled. With an unsteady hand he petted and soothed the shocked animal. His mind was suddenly a hard and unfamiliar instrument that worked by itself unaffected by the fear that shook his body. He

thought of the opened drawer behind him and what it contained. Under his hand Ginger began to purr again.

"All right. I'll show you where it is," he said in a level voice.

With the gun behind him he led Willet back to the living room and faced the corner where the disconnected lamp stood. Against the wall was the enormous mahogany bookcase, near it was the small table with the water plants.

That was all. And it was in this corner that he had to convince Willet that the thing was hidden.

"I'll have to move the bookcase away from the wall," he said. "It's quite heavy. Will you help me?"

Willet was suspicious as he had hoped he would be. "Not me, I'm holding the gun, remember? Anyway you didn't have time to move it before I came up here. What's the idea?"

"I didn't have to move it." Horace's voice was surprisingly steady. "I threw it up over the top when the bell rang. It fell down behind. I can manage it myself, I guess. But I'll need more light."

He pressed the lamp switch. "Now what is the matter with . . . Oh yes." He bent down and plugged the cord in. The light went on.

"I'd better move this little table out of my way." He lifted it with care, balancing the vase of water plants on it. "Now, Ginger, keep out of my way," he said gently, hoping that Ginger would understand the tone and not the words.

Ginger obligingly came to him rubbing against Horace's legs. Horace lifted one foot and gently pushed him away. As he did so the table top tilted just enough. The vase crashed to the floor. There was a lot of water. The frayed lamp cord lay in a little puddle, but nothing happened.

"Oh dear, I'm sorry. I'll have to wipe that up . . . there's a cloth in the . . ."

"Move the bookcase and don't be a fool," Willet snapped.

"Of course . . . I . . ."

With a loud *sphut* the lights went out.

As Willet swore Horace moved toward the foyer. A minute, only a minute . . .

He stumbled against a soft body, scraping the floor in his effort to keep on his feet. The noise wasn't loud but it was enough. Instantly the gun was between his shoulder blades pressing cruelly so that he felt the hard mouth through topcoat and suit as if it were biting into naked flesh.

Sick with despair he realized that Ginger's curiosity had betrayed him. The cat after his leap away from the falling vase had returned to investigate and Horace had stumbled over him.

"You asked for it!" Willet's voice was as empty and metallic as the snap of a trigger. And now that he thought the thing was behind the bookcase, he *would* kill, he would . . .

"The landlady!" Horace cried. "She's coming up here. If I don't answer she'll let herself in with the pass key."

"What? You're lying. Why should she?"

Horace improvised wildly. "A stupid arrangement . . . only temporary . . . until they rewire the house . . . Fuse box in my foyer controls her apartment too . . . Her lights out as well . . . I'll have to let her in."

The gun pressed less hard. And he knew that although Willet doubted, he was afraid to act on that doubt.

"You won't let her in, Dilby. I saw fuses in the kitchen. I'll hold the flashlight while you change them. Come on."

He groped his way to the kitchen and the gun never lost contact with his back.

"How long before she gets up here?" Willet demanded hoarsely.

"Right away if she was in her apartment when the lights went out. But she might be in the cellar or in the yard, then she might take a few minutes."

Horace fussed over the kitchen drawer. It was ridiculous, a silly idea, but he had to try, and the slightest distraction might help. The flashlight dazzled him making him feel even more defenseless. He prayed for courage. But he was despicably afraid. Afraid of the gun, afraid of the light, afraid of the thin vicious face, afraid, most of all, of the impersonal cruelty of life.

"I'll have to carry out the stepladder," he explained. "The fuse box is up over the door."

He put the fuses in his pocket and caressed the tight little cellophane package of catnip. Catnip and fuses against a gun! He giggled hysterically.

Willet swore. The gun pushed him toward the ladder.

He set it up in front of the door in the foyer, tested its steadiness, mounted two rungs, and then came down again.

"What the hell's the matter now?" Willet whispered.

"I almost forgot. If I don't disconnect the lamp first the fuse may blow all over again."

It was unanswerable. Willet had to take him back to the lamp.

Horace tugged at the plug, pretending. "Bring the light closer, please. It seems to have stuck."

While one hand pulled at the cord the other was in his pocket. His finger nail slit the cellophane.

"What's that?" Horace lifted his head, listening. "I think she's coming in!"

"If she does," Willet said, "I'll kill her."

Horace called out, "Don't come in, Mrs. Forest. I'm on the ladder changing the fuse. You'll knock me down."

He allowed the plug to come out suddenly and sat down heavily on the floor. His hand pushed catnip into Willet's trouser cuff.

Calling another reassurance to the non-existent landlady he went back to the foyer and mounted the ladder.

He yanked open the fuse box. *Ginger, Ginger!* Hadn't he smelled it yet? Had that one kick from Willet so discouraged the cat that even the scent of catnip could not tempt him?

The beam of light pointed upward steadily, too steadily. Slowly he unscrewed the fuse. Willet's face was there below him, looking up, a pale featureless blob behind the light. The gun and the light.

He shivered.

Then he heard Willet's startled exclamation, heard the foot trying to shake off the claws. A sharp cry of pain.

The flashlight swung erratically down the wall away from Horace. He poised his foot and kicked out from the ladder with all his strength. It caught the point of Willet's chin. The head snapped back, but it was the light not the gun that fell to the floor. Horace jumped.

They were on the floor. He had the hand, twisting it in a blind passion of exertion. Then he bit the flesh hard, Willet squealed like an animal, and the gun was his. He swung the butt in a fierce arc and heard it crack on Willet's skull. He waited anxiously, but there was no movement, only a hoarse deep breathing.

Moving as in a dream he picked up the light, found picture wire in a drawer and trussed the unconscious man. Then he replaced the fuse and put away the ladder. He brought out milk and liver, but Ginger wasn't interested. He was happily at work on the intoxicating trouser cuff.

These tasks finished he had to think what to do next. Surely they had made a great deal of noise. Wouldn't someone come to see if he had had an accident? Reflecting bitterly that a man could be murdered in his own apartment and no one care, he threw an angry glance at the ceiling.

Laughing and dancing! Callous indifference! If he'd been shot they wouldn't have heard it, or been interested if they had heard. His rage mounted like a rocket and he went to the telephone.

He found himself complaining to the policeman who answered his call about the noise of the party.

"I know it's not very late," he said hysterically, "but that is no reason they can't be a little

quieter . . . I've had a very trying evening . . ." And suddenly he was calm, very calm. "Please send someone." He gave his name and address. "I have a man here, he's been holding me at the point of a gun . . .

"No, I'm not upset! Yes, of course I am. Wouldn't you be? His name's Willet. I think he murdered someone called Harlan . . ."

Now the official voice was interested. Harlan's body had been found.

"No, I'm all right. He's tied up. I'm a bit confused about the facts, but I've got him for you."

With a sigh he cradled the phone and waited for them to come.

Willet was still unconscious when they removed him.

Horace listened to the police and answered their questions. Really, they knew more than he did about the whole business. The body had been discovered when Mrs. Harlan came back from walking her dog in the park. Knocking on her husband's study door and receiving no answer she had gone in to find him murdered. Willet was not suspected because she was sure her husband had been alive when the secretary left the house at the end of his working day. She had heard them saying good night.

"He must have gone back in through the study window," the police lieutenant said. "It's a private house with a garden."

They found the *Tribune* in the ash can where Horace had thrown it. Inside the paper was a blood-stained knife, an ornate monogrammed knife.

"Those are Mrs. Harlan's initials," the lieutenant said. "She used it on her desk. It didn't look good that it was missing. She was the only one who had left the house. That was Willet's idea. We were supposed to find it in the park where she walked the dog. They didn't get along. The cook said they had violent quarrels. It didn't look good." He eyed Horace curiously. "Just what made you pick it up?"

Horace flushed. "The way he looked," he said weakly. "I just had a feeling."

That seemed to satisfy the lieutenant who expressed a great respect for hunches. "But how did you get the gun away from him?"

Horace was aware that the policeman's eye was traveling over his dumpy figure, it was not a complimentary glance.

"Well . . . Ginger helped by . . . er . . . creating a diversion. Then I kicked him in the jaw."

There was a brief silence. Horace added no explanation. He had never been one to say more than was necessary.

Sunday was a busy day. What with the newspaper reporters and the people in the house, Horace hardly had a minute to himself.

It was quite touching to see how concerned his neighbors were. The lady upstairs was quite upset.

"And there we were enjoying ourselves without any idea . . ."

"Yes," Horace said dryly, "I heard you."

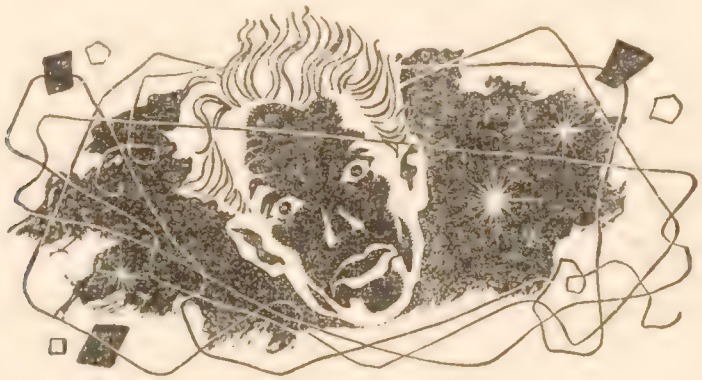
She smiled. She was really a very nice looking woman. "Next Saturday won't you join us? A party's more fun if you're not underneath it."

Monday Horace went to work. He blushed when he read the papers. *"Courage, Catnip and Kitty,"* was one heading. Really! But he was pleased.

It wasn't until he reached his office building that he realized he had not counted a single step, hadn't once looked at his watch, hadn't even thought of bumping anyone. For a moment he was shaken. Freedom, that terrible, unpredictable burden was his!

He couldn't, of course, expect to play the hero, and then go back to safety and a timetable. He understood that. But to be emancipated so soon! And then the feeling of alarm faded. He straightened his shoulders and went up to the office.

Smith and the rest would want to ask questions too, that was only natural, he would try not to disappoint them. He smiled happily. Smith would never know that henceforward the water-cooler would be his without competition.



We've a message for you from that brightly luminous corner of the mysterious universe where the Saint's companion magazine FANTASTIC UNIVERSE, *January issue now on sale, is assembled monthly under the spirited cosmic auspices of the biggest names in science fiction. By guided missile it comes, aureoling two stories in fiery banners of reading pleasure entertainment—a lead novelette by Milton Lesser,* THE DOUBLE OCCUPATION, *which has all the suspense-charged allure of an alien-world detective story dazzlingly told, and—a short story fully as remarkable, Walter Miller's* THE TRIFLIN' MAN.

the widow's share

by . . . William MacHarg

It was the kind of crime you never read about in the papers—because the true story was too grim for the police to relate.

O'MALLEY SAID, "A cop got murdered. Well, he wasn't exactly a cop—he was a special officer, but they hadn't ought to kill no kind of policeman. This was a pay-roll stickup. Four guys come to a factory where they manufacture clothing. The people in the office was making up the pay roll and the four guys held 'em up and got twelve thousand dollars, and then they shot the cop."

"What kind of cop?" I asked.

"He was from a detective agency. Well, I don't like to look at no dead policemen, but I got to look at this one."

We went and looked at him. His name was Carmel. He was a decent-seeming young man and they had put three bullets in him. His wife was there. She was a small and quite beautiful woman and I was extremely sorry for her.

"This is tough luck," O'Malley told her sympathetically.

She cried a little. "When a woman marries an officer," she said, "she knows this might hap-

Murder frameups are usually pretty unglamorous affairs, even when they take place in Miami. This one takes place chiefly in the starkly stripped corridors of a report-writing policeman's mind, and it's as bare of sentimentality as its Hell's Kitchen locale. But William MacHarg, a frequent contributor to COLLIER'S, *the* POST *and other "slick" publications, knows how to wring from ugliness a fascination as compelling as a basilisk's eye.*

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pen. But now that it really has happened I find that I wasn't prepared for it."

"Sure, a cop takes that chance . . . That's a swell lady," he remarked to me when we had left her. "When that dead guy married her he got something."

I agreed with him.

"How was this holdup done?" I asked.

"I don't know only what I heard about it. The cop came over from the agency, the way he always did on paydays. The factory office is on the second floor. The guys from the armored car brought the money up to the office and the paymaster locked the cage door and him and the bookkeeper and two girls begun putting the money in the envelopes, and the cop stood outside the door. Then two guys come up the stairs and asked to see the paymaster, and the cop told 'em they'd have to wait.

"Then another guy come up the back stairs and stuck a gun in the cop's back and took the cop's gun away from him and kept guard on him, and the first two guys pried open the cage door and held 'em up and put the pay roll in some brief cases they carried. Then they shot the cop and run down the stairs and got away in a car where another guy was waiting for them. They can't give us no good descriptions of the four holdups."

"Didn't anybody see the car?"

"Sure, some people got the number of the car but it might not help us any."

"Those holdups seem to have known a lot about that factory."

"Sure, they knew all about it. They asked for the paymaster by name, and they knew when the money would be there, and they knew about the back stairs and where the cop stood."

I thought it over. "It sounds like an inside job," I decided. "As though someone who worked in the factory must have given them all that information."

"You're good—except you are a little late. They pinched the bookkeeper."

They had the bookkeeper at the station house. He was a thin, pale young man, twenty-six years old, and he looked frightened. His name was Neland.

"What part of them twelve thousand was you to get, boy?" O'Malley asked him.

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"Yeah, sure you do. We found out all about you. You asked 'em to raise your pay because you wanted to get married and they told you they couldn't do it. So you looked round to try to get another job but you couldn't get one. So then the place got held up."

"It's true about wanting to get married and not getting a raise but I don't know anything about the holdup."

"Boy, you ain't fooling anybody. You think you'll keep your mouth shut and them guys will see you get your money, and will get a lawyer for you and give you what help they can. I'll tell you something: Them guys ain't even thinking about you. They'll give you nothing. The only one that can help you is yourself, and the only way you can help yourself is by telling who they are."

"I tell you I don't know a thing about it."

When we came out from talking with the bookkeeper, a girl about nineteen years old was talking with the desk lieutenant. She would have been pretty if she hadn't been crying so much.

"Who's this lady?" O'Malley asked.

"This is the dame that guy we got inside there was going to marry. Her name is Derin. Well, there won't be any marrying now."

"What do you know about this holdup, sister?" O'Malley asked her.

"I don't know anything about it."

"I think you do. It'll make it a lot easier for him and you if you tell us all about it. You tell him that."

"They found that car," the desk officer informed us. "It was in the Bronx. They got it at the police garage."

We went and looked at the car. It didn't tell us anything. It had been stolen just before the holdup and had been abandoned right afterward. There weren't any fingerprints. The empty pay envelopes had been left scattered in the car. There were no prints on those.

"What do you think about it, O'Malley?" I inquired.

"Why, I don't see no thinking to be done. We got this case right. Only the people in the office knew what time the pay roll would be there. The two girls have been looked up and they are in the clear, and the bookkeeper had a motive. When we've kept him locked up a while he'll talk. Or else his girl will. I guess I'll see a lot of picture shows while I'm supposed to be working on this case, but right now I got to write out a report, so I got to see that factory."

We went to the factory. It was easy to see how the holdup had been done. We talked with the paymaster, whose name was Kittleman. He was still excited about the holdup and he acted it all out for us. He made the two girls take the places in the office where they had been, and he showed where he himself had been, and then he went and was the bookkeeper.

Then he went out in the hall and was the cop. Then he was the two holdups coming up the stairs. Then he was the third holdup and came up the back stairs and disarmed the cop, and

was the two others again and forced open the door and held himself up, and put the money in the brief cases and shut the people in the office and ran down the stairs. Then he was the third holdup once more and waited while the others ran down the stairs and shot the cop and then ran down after them.

"All you ain't done is drive the car," O'Malley told him.

"Like clockwork it was," Kittleman informed us. "It is bad, bad about the police officer. He came here every payday—the same officer. We knew him well—a fine man. Now he is dead!"

"Yeah, he ain't worrying about nothing now," O'Malley commented. "His wife is, though."

"She's a fine woman too."

"She sure is. Her and her husband got their house in Flushing pretty near paid for. Well, now she'll have no income and she'll lose the house. When a regular cop gets knocked off they see that his wife gets taken care of, but with them agency cops you don't know what's going to be done about her."

He was going to write out his report and so I left him. I saw him next day.

"Anything new?" I asked.

"Why, not a thing. That bookkeeper won't talk. His girl won't neither. But I ain't bothering much about the case. It'll work itself out. Say, listen! I'm getting up a subscription for that dead-cop's widow. Put your name down. Give anything you want."

I put down my name. He had quite a list of names and he seemed in a hurry. I didn't see him for several days. When I met him he was on his way to the detective agency.

"I been there before," he told me, "but I got no satisfaction. They got some arrangement by which Mrs. Carmel gets a little money but it ain't enough."

We saw a young man who seemed to be the secretary. I liked his looks.

"Why, I'm for her," he assured us. "I'd like to see her get something and I'm doing what I can. I'll let you know if they decide to do anything."

O'Malley was going to see Mrs. Carmel about the subscription list, so I said I wouldn't go along, but he said, "Come on."

We met her at a restaurant and I became disgusted; I'd never seen O'Malley so attentive to a woman.

"How often have you seen that woman?" I demanded when we had left her.

"I seen her a few times."

"I have no doubt you have. You're making a fool of yourself."

"How come?"

"It's not the subscription list you're interested in; it's the woman herself. You're crazy over her!"

"A guy can't help how he feels."

"You could keep from showing it."

I was angry with him because he did not seem impressed by what I had said and I walked away from him.

In about three days I saw in the morning paper that four suspects in the holdup case had been arrested. The newspaper account was quite exciting. The men had been picked up in a West Side saloon and in a lodging-house. The police had raided the places with drawn guns and there had been some shooting.

I went to the station house. The place was full of cops. O'Malley wasn't there but he was expected. I talked with the desk lieutenant. They had the four men in cells and had been questioning them. They had the bookkeeper there, and a couple of cops were talking with Miss Derin, who had been crying.

"Have you got the proof of these fellows?" I inquired of the lieutenant.

"Why, not yet. But I expect we'll get it. The weak one in this mob is a bird named Mike Moritt. If one of 'em cracks, he's going to be the one."

Then O'Malley and Mrs. Carmel came in and went into the captain's room while she signed some papers in connection with the subscription, and they brought Moritt up for questioning. He had a weak chin and his eyes kept shifting. The door of the captain's room was open, and Moritt had to wait a minute for Mrs. Carmel to finish signing. Then Mrs. Carmel came out and they took Moritt in and about a dozen cops went in with him and I went along.

"Well, guy," O'Malley said to Moritt, "we pinned this on you. The bullets that was in the dead officer come from the gun we found at your place, them people at the factory have identified you and your pals, and your lady friend has squealed on you. I guess you seen her signing her confession."

Moritt's eyes shifted more and more. He didn't know whether to believe it; then he did. "She would!" he shouted bitterly. "I told 'em not to take on no job that had a dame in it! We done our part. We knocked the cop off for her. But I told 'em she'd walk out on us!"

The two plainclothesmen came in, bringing the young man we'd seen at the detective agency, and some cops brought the bookkeeper and he and Miss Derin went away together.

"How was all this, O'Malley?" I demanded in perplexity.

"You don't act very bright this morning. Mrs. Carmel and that young guy at the detective agency, whose name is Boling, was going together. They wanted to get rid of her husband. Well, she didn't

want to leave her husband because they had a house that was nearly paid for, and furniture, and Mrs. Carmel is a woman that looks for her own advantage. They figured to get her husband knocked off in some way they wouldn't look to be connected with it. So then they thought about a holdup.

"Mrs. Carmel had went to that factory a couple of times to see her husband and she knew the layout, and what she didn't know she got by questioning her husband, and the agency guy would know what time the cop would be there to protect the pay roll. He got in touch with some tough kids that would knock off a half a dozen people to get twelve thousand dollars, and arranged to give the information to 'em. In return they was to bump off the cop.

"The kind of woman Mrs. Carmel is, Moritt says she tried to get 'em to give her a cut-in on the pay roll too, but they wouldn't do it. They told her if they knocked off her husband for her that was enough."

"So the bookkeeper didn't have anything to do with it," I reflected. "But you thought he did. When did you change your mind?"

"If you was smart you'd have seen me change it when he was at the factory. Sure, I went there thinking it was the bookkeeper. Well, Kittleman showed us how the holdup was done. He took the parts of all them holdups and run up and down the stairs and acted out everything. It looked funny to me how they shot the cop.

"Two guys had got the money and had run down the stairs and everything was over, and the third guy shot the cop. The cop couldn't do nothing; they had got his gun. They could have put him in the office with them other people. From what Kittleman said, these holdup guys were experts, and it showed they was, because they got away without no one getting a good description of 'em, and experts don't shoot no cop unless they have to.

"I couldn't see the sense to it. I wondered had the cop recognized one of them holdups, or what was it? The cop knew the layout of the factory and he knew when the pay roll would be there because he had to be there to guard it. Might it be the cop that slipped them guys the information and then had some disagreement with them parties?

"I left them other detectives to check up the bookkeeper and find out if he knew any guys that would do a holdup, and I figured I'd check up the cop. So then I thought about getting up that subscription so I could talk with Mrs. Carmel about her husband without her getting suspicious. Everybody said she was a swell lady. Well, I couldn't find noth-

ing wrong about the cop, but the thing I run onto was that Mrs. Carmel had been seen places with a guy that wasn't her husband. They give me a description of the guy that had been seen with her, and it matched up to a guy I had seen at the Detective Agency. So that was how it might be; Mrs. Carmel could have given 'em the layout of the factory and Boling could have passed the word to 'em what time the cop was going to be there to guard the pay roll."

"I see."

"Yeah. But what good did it do me? I couldn't prove nothing. We had Boling watched and he wasn't in contact with no crooks. So I asked myself, what would a guy in an agency do if he wanted someone to do a murder for him? Why, he'd look up the agency records and find some guy that done holdups and wasn't in jail and was in New York. I seen the head of the agency and told him I figured his secretary was partner in a murder, and he let me go to their office at night and look over the records.

"Well, I found several guys that had grabbed pay rolls. One of 'em was Moritt. He hung out on the West Side and went with some guys, and we showed pictures of them to the people at the factory and they picked the ones that done the holdup. We pinched 'em and found the gun that killed the cop. We asked 'em had Mrs. Carmel and Boling had anything to do with it, and they claimed not to know about no holdup, and we couldn't prove how it was without someone confessing.

"So then we figured to work some kind of police gag on 'em. When several guys do a crime and you make 'em believe one of 'em has confessed, they blow up and start accusing one another. That gag has got whiskers on it like Methuselah, but being that old just shows how good it works —a gag that don't work don't never get no chance to get old. I told Mrs. Carmel we had some checks for her on the subscription and she had to sign receipts for 'em, and she come to the station house and we let Moritt see her signing, and we told him she was signing her confession. Well, you seen how it was; he blew his top."

"You certainly worked that case out," I commended him.

"Yeah? You won't hear of me in it. A lot of cops was on this case, and whatever guy is writing his report is the one that done the whole of it. Well, that's the police business."

Don't forget—THE SAINT'S *a* MONTHLY *magazine now; just 30 days to wait*

murder at christmas

by . . . Christopher Bush

He decked murder with the sprigs of a Yuletide bough, famous in legend and story. But he made none too good a job of his alibi.

I DROVE DOWN to Worbury on the afternoon before Christmas Eve. My wife had been called away to help nurse an aged and ailing aunt, and so I rang Bob Valence and asked if his invitation was still on for, say, the Christmas week-end. He wanted me to make it a week.

Worbury—which isn't its real name—is a town of some 2,000 people, and Robert Valence is its Chief Constable. He and I have run up against each other a lot professionally, since I'm at odd moments what the Yard chooses to call an unofficial expert, and he seems to think he's in my debt. In any case, I like him. He knows his job but makes no boasts, and he's genuine all through.

I was looking forward to that holiday. There's more futility than festivity alone in a London flat for Christmas, and, as I said, I liked Valence. He's a bachelor, by the way, and has a very nice service flat within a few hundred yards of his headquarters.

I'd been told to bring my golf

Famed British mystery story writer Christopher Bush insists here with a quite beguiling persuasiveness that you accompany him through the somber byways of Catley wood in a season of holiday cheer, moderating only a little your Yuletide rejoicing until you are starkly sobered by as chilling a crime as he has ever planted in your path. You'll join him, assuredly.

clubs. We should have played on the morning of Christmas Eve, but there'd been a burglary in Marshwell, a village near-by, and Valence was called there well before we were thinking of starting for golf. But to get to Marshwell one goes through Rendham, which is two miles from Worbury, and the golf-course is there. So our golf bags went in the car and the new plans were for an early lunch at the clubhouse and a quick get-away after it, and with the certainty of a comfortable finish before dusk and a possible fog. December was uncommonly open that year, and when you get sun in the day you're almost bound to get fog at night.

That robbery at Marshwell Hall took up more of Valence's time than we'd thought, and it was getting on for one o'clock when we left. It's three miles from there to Rendham, and as we came to the first house of the straggling village Valence suddenly slowed the car.

"See this chap coming towards us? Know who he is?"

I had five seconds, perhaps, in which to look, and what I saw was a man of sixty or more, short and with thin, stooping shoulders. I placed him as a retired professional man.

"Don't know," I said.

"He's Brewse. John Black Brewse!"

My eyes popped a bit. "Good Lord! What's he doing down here?"

"He has to live somewhere," Valence told me dryly. "Suppose he thought Rendham'd be as good as anywhere else. He has that first house back there. The one with the walled garden."

"Any of his victims here?"

"One at least here," he said, "and one or two in Worbury. I doubt if there's a town in the country where there isn't."

I supposed he was right. Brewse was the last of the line of financial swindlers, and it says a good deal for his plausibility that even among his victims there were still those who could judge him more unlucky than guilty. But he'd been put away for eight years and, considering the misery he had brought to thousands, I thought him lucky to have had so short a sentence.

"How long's he been here?"

"About a year," he said. "Almost as soon as he came out. The house, I gather, was bought beforehand in his housekeeper's name, so Rendham didn't guess what it was in for."

"There was a bit of a stir?"

He laughed. "'Stir' isn't the word. A man named Allgood—has a big furniture store in Worbury—was behind it. There was writing on Brewse's wall and his house. *No jailbirds wanted*, and that sort of thing, and then when someone set fire to his shed, I had to step in."

"And all's quiet now on the Rendham front?"

"I think so. Rice, the local man, hasn't reported anything lately, and Brewse lives very quietly. Just goes out for his daily walk and that's all."

Then suddenly he was braking the car and looking to the right. We were through the actual village and almost at the entrance to the course, and he was looking along what was little more than a metalled tract that made a sort of ride in a long stretch of wood. Drawn among the trees just off that track was a van. Valence took a long squint at it. Then he smiled.

"That'll be So-and-So," he said. "Thought it might be one of our Gipsy friends. Rice has been chasing them quite a lot. They come round the woods after holly and greenery and hawk it round the town."

Through the thinned, leafless tops of the oaks I could see a quick-rising upland of green, which was the golf-course, and almost at once we were turning in at the gates. Quite a few cars were in the park.

"We'll just have a cold snack and some beer," Valence said, "then we can get away at once. Suit you all right?

So we had sandwiches and beer in the bar. When we went to the locker-room, a couple of men were just going out. One was a tall, powerful looking chap in the late thirties and the other a plump, but far from flabby, parson in the forties.

"Hallo, Padre," Valence said. "Having another crack at the Demon?"

"Well, yes," the parson said blandly. "Trying to exorcise is perhaps the better term."

Valence laughed. "And how're you, Prowse?" he said to the other chap. "This is a friend of mine, Ludovic Travers. This is Mayne and this is Prowse."

Mayne, he added, was the local vicar and Prowse the golf demon. A good-looking fellow, Prowse, with the very devil of a grip. Then when they'd gone, Valence told me some more. Mayne was a four man; not long, but exasperatingly straight, and positively deadly round the greens. Prowse was plus one.

"Wait a minute," I said. "Did not he put up quite a good show in last year's Amateur? Or have I got the name wrong?"

"You're quite right," he said. "He was actually in the last eight. Got knocked out by a winner."

We had quite a good game. I'm six feet, three inches and lean as a lamppost, and when I hit them just right they go the devil of a way. Valence is a lusty hitter, too, especially with his irons. At the dog-legged thirteenth he actually took an iron from the tee and played well out to the left. The hole itself lay behind

an out-jutting spur of the wood which ran along that track — Frog's Lane, it was called—where Valence thought he had spotted a Gipsy. The cracks, like Prowse, could carry that spur of wood and get an easy four.

I almost had a go at it myself, but I was two down and didn't like to risk it, so I too took an iron and kept away to the left. And, of course, I overdid it, and that was to put me three down. But it did give me the chance to see Prowse driving at the sixteenth—a terrific crack that went straighter and farther than my incredible best.

When we got back to the clubhouse Prowse and the Vicar had gone, but the steward told us that Prowse had won by two up. Valence and I had tea and then cut in for bridge. We were in the second rubber when he was called to the telephone. He came back all apologies. Something had cropped up and he had to go.

When we stepped outside there was a fog that might have been much worse. It was more like a heavy mist, with a visibility of about fifty yards, which made it more of a nuisance than a menace.

"Sorry to have to rush you about like this," Valence said. "It may be for nothing, after all, but some man or other just rang the station and said there was a man's body in Catley Wood. That's about half-way home."

And that was all he knew. Clare—his Chief-Inspector—had rung him about that anonymous call, and was on the way himself to Catley Wood. Hoax or not, he had at least to make sure.

A mile on the homeward road and there on the left was the stretch of wood. A car was drawn up on the verge and we stopped just short. Clare was in the wood, and we saw the flash of his torch. Valence hailed him and his own torch flashed ahead through the sparse trees. But there was practically no undergrowth, and thirty yards on we picked up Clare and Sprat, the police-surgeon.

"No hoax, sir," Clare said, and held his torch to what was on the ground. A small man lay there. An elderly man in a dark overcoat; face sideways and arms flung wide. Valence's own torch caught the face and stayed.

"Good God!" he said. "See who it is? Brewse!"

Brewse it was. But he got down on one knee and turned the face round. He looked at the eyes and pried open the mouth.

"What killed him, Sprat?"

"Manual strangulation," Sprat said. "There's a contusion on the point of the chin, so it looks as if he was knocked out first."

"When?"

"Don't know," Sprat said. "Three hours ago—more or less. Tell you when I've got him

away. Might do something with that stomach content."

Valence got to his feet. It was dark in that wood — black as black hogs, as they say in Suffolk —and I could barely see the lighter blackness that was his face.

"Sorry about this, Travers. I'll have you run back and then you could get a meal at the Lion. Or would you rather stay?"

I said I'd rather stay.

It was after eight when we got back to town, though Brewse's body, had gone well before that. In Valence's office we had a look at his clothes, which had come in from the surgeon's room, and the contents of his pockets. There was a fairish sum of money in what seemed an intact wallet. As for the clothes, the overcoat had lichen stains on the back.

"Almost looks as if he was leaning against a tree in that wood, waiting for someone," Valence said.

"A queer spot, surely, to fix for an appointment?" I said. "No undergrowth, and only twenty yards from the road. Anyone could have seen both him and whomever it was he was meeting."

"Depends when it was."

"I don't know," I said. "If the appointment was for after dark, why should Brewse go all that way? Anywhere would have done. His house, for example. If the appointment was for daylight, then that wood was useless as a screen."

"I've got a vague idea that'd explain some of that," he said. "The appointment might have been with someone coming from here, and if so, that wood was about halfway."

"Anyone special in mind?"

He frowned. "Well, there's always that chap Allgood I told you about. He lost a packet over Brewse. It was an employee of his whom Rice caught tarring a threatening message on the side of Brewse's house."

"Anyone in Rendham who lost money over Brewse?"

"There is," he said. "Mayne did. Only indirectly. An aunt of his lost quite a lot.

"And what about the man who rang the station about the body?"

"Just an anonymous voice. Might have been the man of a courting couple, going in there and finding the body. A local call, so it can't be traced. About time, by the way, that we had something from Sprat."

He rang through to the mortuary. From his grunts and monosyllables I couldn't guess what he was being told. But the news did turn out to be definite. Brewse's last meal had been at one o'clock. The stomach content showed death as taking place as so near to three o'clock it made no difference.

Valence said he'd like to see

that housekeeper, so off we went through the mist to Rendham and Brewse's house. The elderly housekeeper was called Callaby. She was a loyal sort of soul who'd been with Brewse and his people most of her life. She confirmed that he had had his lunch that day at one o'clock sharp.

"Any letters this morning?"

She said there were none.

"Any telephone calls?"

He'd explained to me that the telephone had had to be disconnected soon after Brewse's arrival in Rendham. Scurrilous and threatening messages were always being received. But now the phone was in use again.

"There was a call early this morning," she said. "Just about nine o'clock."

"You don't know from whom?"

She didn't know a thing, except that Brewse himself took the call. But she had been thinking. It now struck her that he had been just a bit perturbed after that call. And he had gone out for a walk, which was a queer thing for him. His walks were invariably in the afternoons. He had left for that afternoon walk about a quarter to three. She had seen him from her bedroom.

That was about all. Valence asked if he might use the telephone, and after he'd finished, we thanked her and left. Valence told me the morning call had been a local one. He added that we might as well drop in on Prowse. I asked no questions, though I didn't see why.

Prowse looked surprised to see us. His daily woman had gone and he was in slippers, with a drink at a side-table by his chair. He wanted us to have a drink too. Valence said he was technically on duty, and told him about Brewse.

"This has to be strictly confidential," he said, "but it's obvious that if Brewse was murdered, the likely suspects are those whose money he took. My superiors will expect me to question them. But I'd rather not question Mayne."

Prowse smiled. "You're surely not suggesting—"

"I'm not suggesting anything," Valence told him bluntly. "I'm telling you in strict confidence what I have to do as part of my job. All I'm asking is that you'd be prepared to swear, if necessary, that Mayne was never out of your sight this afternoon."

"But of course he wasn't!"

"You never broke off the game?"

"Not for a second. We played straight on."

"Good enough," Valence said. "Keep what I've asked you under your hat. Call it red-tape or what you will. And now I think we'll have that drink you offered us."

Prowse poured the drinks and

he noticed me looking round.

"Something struck me as unusual," I said, "and I've just found out what. This is Christmas Eve, but there's no holly."

"No holly for me," he said. "I'm a widower, with no chick or child. Christmas is just something you've got to forget."

One of my minor hobbies is to spot accents, and by that I mean to identify a person's native county. Prowse, when I asked him, said he was a Londoner. He'd been in Rendham only a few years. The property had actually been bought just before his wife died, and he'd then intended to sell it again. Then he'd changed his mind, fallen in love with the countryside and had become virtually a Rendhamian.

We'd been talking just for sociability over the drinks, and in about ten minutes we left. Allgood was waiting in the annex to Valence's room and Valence had him in at once. He was a beefy-looking man of about sixty. Valence told him about Brewse, and before he'd recovered from what seemed a shock, talked about red-tape and so on.

"You didn't like Brewse."

"I hated the swine," Allgood told him. "I don't give a damn if he's dead or alive. I still hate him."

"Then, just for the records, where were you at three o'clock this afternoon?"

"Well—" His eyes suddenly goggled. "That's funny. At three o'clock I was within a stone's-throw of Brewse's place. Tell you how it was. I had a man to see at Cambridge and I was on my way when I got a puncture just where I said, and when I got the wheel off and the spare on, I found I hadn't got my pump with me, so I had to wait till a car came by, and that wasn't till just on three. I happened to stop a lorry and the driver gave me a hand."

"Name and name of his firm? Still just for the records."

"Darned if I know," Allgood said. "He drew up his lorry ahead of me, so I didn't see any name. And I didn't ask him his. I did tip him half-a-dollar."

"That's all right," Valence said. "Suppose you didn't happen to see Brewse by any chance?"

"Matter of fact, I did. I happened to look round and there he was, walking towards the village. I hadn't seen him come out of his house, because I'd been busy over that spare."

"What'd be the time when you saw him?"

"Be about a quarter to three," he said. "He was just short of the turn."

"Well, that's that," Valence said when Allgood had gone. "Confirms what that Miss Callaby said about Brewse going out. And I'd say he was going to see the one who rang him this morning."

"Then he couldn't have been killed before a quarter past three," I said. "He wasn't a fast walker and it'd have taken him half an hour to get to Catley Wood. It's a good mile and a half."

"Stomach content isn't accurate to a second," Valence said. "A quarter of an hour either way is good enough. I don't know about you, but I'm damnably hungry."

We managed to get sandwiches and coffee brought in. Valence asked if I had any ideas, and I said I'd never a one.

"Just one thing that's rather footling," I said. "I'm pretty sure that Prowse told me a lie."

His eyebrows raised at that.

"Nothing to do with Brewse," I hastened to say. And I told him about that hobby of mine and how I was dead sure—as a Suffolk man myself—that Prowse was a Suffolk or South Norfolk man. Certain subtleties of accent and intonation had made that unmistakable.

Valence seemed rather amused. If he was interested, it was only out of politeness. I said it wasn't important, but I just happened to have a tidy mind: one that resented being cluttered up with irreconcilables.

He left me to finish the sandwiches while he went to Clare's room. While I was lighting my pipe I happened to drop my pouch on the floor, and when I picked it up, my fingers had a red stain. I looked at the pouch and that was where the red came from. For a moment I thought of blood, but I hadn't scratched my hand. Then I looked on the floor and there was a crushed holly berry, and I had to smile. I even thought of those lines from the old carol—

The holly bears a berry
As red as any blood.

and I didn't think any more, because Valence had to come back just then and he was saying that everything was well in hand and we might as well get along to the flat and have a real, belated meal.

Two days went by and Valence was making no headway. A search of the wood where the body was found had revealed never a thing. Someone had simply come up to Brewse, given him that quick upper-cut to the jaw, strangled him, and gone. But Valence did have some other, faint ideas. Allgood might have gone after Brewse and had words with him and lost his temper and strangled him, and then carted the body to where it was found.

After all, a puncture was an easy thing to fake. Even if the supposed lorry driver was found, Allgood still had no real alibi. But *might* was what they call the operative word, and what Valence was anxiously dreading was having to call in the Yard.

The Allgood theory was largely hope.

And I couldn't tag along all day at Valence's heels. I had plenty of time to myself; not that that worried me. I was more concerned about Valence's really pathetic apologies, which persisted even when I assured him that I was happy doing nothing in particular.

But one can't have leisure without thought, and I did quite a lot of thinking, and I have what's known as a harum-scarum mind. Unsolved mysteries nag at me, however insignificant they may seem, and I was pestered by a wonder why Prowse had told me that lie, for lie I was sure it was. Then I happened to run into Rice, the constable, who'd been at Rendham for some years. I had to be tactful in mentioning Prowse, and only as a golfer.

"How long's he been at Rendham, Rice?"

"Mr. Prowse?" he frowned. "Be just seven years come January."

"Of course!" I said it as if I'd just remembered. "A London firm brought his things, didn't they?"

"That's right," he said. "Two vans. Harridges it was. I know, because I had a few words about a smashed gate-post with one of the drivers."

So Prowse *had* come from London, and somehow I was wrong. But I still didn't know. To come from London doesn't make one a Londoner. So I did some more thinking, and when thinking got unbearable I rang the Broad Street Detective Agency. This was in the days when Bill Ellice owned it.

I told him about Prowse and gave a full description. He was to find out what he could from Harridges. That was early in the morning.

At seven that evening he rang me as arranged. The furniture had indeed been collected by Harridges, but not from a London address. It had come from a little village called Felling, which is near Bury St. Edmunds, in Suffolk.

"Right, Bill," I said. "Get busy on this at once. Get a good man down to this Felling place and have him find out everything he can about Prowse. Give me a ring this time tomorrow night."

Then when I'd hung up I wondered why the devil I'd given him that assignment. It wasn't the expense that bothered me, but merely an apprehension of futility. Why worry one's head about Prowse when he, like his partner, Mayne, could not conceivably have had anything to do with the killing of Brewse? The only answer was that I was both hunch-ridden and curiosity-ridden, and it would probably cost me a couple of ten-pound notes.

Meanwhile Valence was worried. He'd found that lorry driver, but the Allgood theory was unaffected, and to carry that theory forward into proof was proving beyond him. While he had found someone who had seen Allgood's car on its way through Rendham to Cambridge, nobody had seen it going back towards Worbury, as it must have done if he had been carrying Brewse's body.

Valence, in fact, was on the point of calling in Scotland Yard. Any man takes pride in his job, and it more than irked him that this, a murder case that had naturally excited a pretty general interest, should need the Yard for its solving. I was sorry for him, but there was nothing I could do to help.

I ran into Mayne as I was leaving the cinema that early evening. He told me he was playing Prowse again in a day or so.

"Plucky of you challenging him on level terms," I said.

"The last time it was he who challenged me," he said. "But it doesn't work out too dear at ten bob a time. Sooner or later I'll be at the collecting end."

I wished him luck and went on to the post office for Ellice's call. And I got one of the surprises of my life. Prowse's wife had been Brewse's niece, and Felling village reckoned that it was the disgrace of her uncle's imprisonment that had killed her. But there was more to come. Prowse's name wasn't Prowse at all. His name was Palfrey. He had changed to Prowse after leaving Felling.

Valence was in the flat when I got back. In the morning, he said, he'd be meeting his Watch Committee and recommending calling in the Yard. Just to take his mind off things, I told him what I'd unearthed about Prowse.

"Where's it get us?" he said, and shrugged his shoulders. "We know he couldn't have killed Brewse. Besides, he had to change his name and dig himself in anonymously down here on account of the Brewse business. He wouldn't want his wife's name, or his own, connected in any way."

Of course he was right, and yet again I couldn't help thinking. He had to go out after dinner and that left me to the thoughts, and when they'd circled so as almost to drive me mad, I suddenly remembered something. So I got through to the Yard.

Brewse's clothes had gone there for a laboratory check, and all I wanted was an answer to a certain question. I was promised it by the morning—and early. Then I rang Mayne and asked him a question, and after that I began to feel as if I might get a good night's rest.

It was during breakfast that the call came for me from the

Yard, and it gave me just what I wanted.

"I wonder if you'd like to try a gamble before you see your Watch Committee," I said to Valence. "Let's run out to Rendham at once and see Prowse."

"But why?"

"Just to try out a hunch," I said. "It won't cost a thing. And let me do the talking."

"You really think—?"

"Yes," I said. "I think we might get something out of Prowse. Better take a couple of men with us. One for Prowse's back door and the other for his garage."

He didn't ask any more questions, though he was hard put to it while we were making for Rendham.

Prowse looked mightily surprised at the sight of us at that early hour.

"Just a thing or two you might help us about," Valence said, and Prowse was ushering us in.

"Sorry I can't offer you coffee. Unless you'd wait a minute or two while I make it."

"We've just had breakfast," I replied. "All we want is some information."

"Not about poor old Mayne again?"

"Not this time," I said. "What Valence is really here for is to arrest you for the murder of Brewse."

He stared incredulously. "You mad? Or am I? You know as well as I do that I couldn't have been within a mile of Brewse."

I said that we were running the risk of arresting him all the same, and I duly intoned the caution.

"If you insist," he said. "But I warn you that you'll look a couple of fools when Mayne gets on the stand."

"Let me change your mind for you," I said. "Listen to me for a minute or two while I tell you just what happened. But, starting from the beginning, your name's Palfrey. Your late wife was Brewse's niece."

That shook him, if only for a moment. Then he was telling me to carry on, but his lips had clamped together just a bit too tight.

"It was one of those tremendous coincidences, Brewse's coming here," I said. "Just the last straw. I think you regarded him as the murderer of your wife and, what's more, you and he couldn't live in the same village. You might have found another name, but sooner or later he'd meet you, and you wondered what he'd do. So you planned things out. You yourself fixed that game of golf with Mayne, and because Mayne didn't like Brewse either. In the event of any unforeseen slip-up over that alibi of yours, he'd keep his mouth shut or swing things your way.

"But you'd rung Brewse and

told him who you were, though I doubt if you let him know you were living in Rendham under another name. You fixed an interview for Frog's Lane at three o'clock and your golf was timed accordingly. At just before three o'clock you were at the thirteenth. Mayne says he was astounded when you seemed to drive deliberately into that wood. He didn't realize that you, as a golfer of the first rank, could put your ball virtually where you liked and that you really did deliberately drive into the wood.

"You told him you know just where the ball dropped, and he needn't bother to help you find it. So you went into the wood, with its holly undergrowth, and you found Brewse waiting. You knocked him out and strangled him and hid his body in a holly clump. Then you doubled back to the fairway showing a ball as if you'd found your own, *and Mayne was prepared to swear he hadn't really had you out of his sight all that afternoon.*

"Then at dusk you took the body to where it was found and you faked your voice and rang the police. You wanted the body found quickly so that there should be no doubt about when he died. Your alibi depended on that. But we know Brewse wasn't killed in Catley Wood. There's no holly there. But there was a holly-berry in the turn-up of Brewse's trousers, and it fell out on the floor of Valence's room. And Scotland Yard have found minute holly tears in his clothes and even a couple of thorns."

"Clever," he said. "As a fairy-tale, it's clever."

"It'll be clever enough to hang you," Valence told him grimly.

"Two other little things," I said. "Brewse never went out of a morning, but he did go out that morning, and because, after that telephone conversation, he had to make sure where Frog's Lane actually was and the spot where you'd told him to meet you. The other thing is this."

I held my clenched hand towards him. "No holly in this house, so you didn't carry any from anywhere in your car. And yet in your car were these."

I opened the hand and showed him a couple of holly leaves and a few berries. He stared, and then suddenly he was on his feet and through the side door.

Valence gave a yell and was after him. But he needn't have worried. Clare had him, and that was when we heard the shot. But Prowse made none too good a job of shooting himself, and it was not till two days later that he died in a hospital.

"I didn't know you had a crack at his car and found those holly berries." Valence told me as we were leaving the hospital.

I sort of grinned and left it at that. I couldn't very well admit that I'd never seen the car.

judge priest—murder witness

by . . . Irvin S. Cobb

A jury trial in the Old South may be swayed by the darkest kind of prejudice—or guided by one wise man toward a shining light.

WHEN BRECK TANDY killed a man he made a number of mistakes. In the first place, he killed the most popular man in Forked Deer County—the county clerk, Abner J. Rankin. In the second place, he killed him with no witnesses present, so that the authorities had to weigh the testimony of a newcomer and a stranger against the mute, eloquent accusation of a riddled dead man. And worst of all, he sent north of the Ohio River for a lawyer to defend him.

On the first Monday in June—Court Monday—the town filled up early. Before the field larks were out of the grass the farmers were tying their teams to the gnawed hitch-racks along the square. By nine o'clock the swapping ring below the wagonyard was swimming in red dust and clamorous with the chaffer of the horse-traders.

In front of a vacant store the Ladies' Aid Society of Zion Baptist Church had a canvas sign out, announcing that an elegant din-

There's a rich golden mellowness in the telling of an Irvin S. Cobb story of the South he knew and loved so well that at first appearance may seem just a little deceptively sentimental. But in sober truth they are as sparklingly modern as dew still wet and glistening on the hedges of a suburban garden within commuting distance of New York. For who would not greet Judge Priest as a neighbor, warm and friendly, were he to stride with wit untarnished straight out of a story such as this.

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ner would be served for twenty-five cents from twelve to one, to be followed by a charity benefit.

The narrow wooden sidewalks began to creak and churn under the tread of many feet. A long-haired medicine doctor emerged from his frock-coat like a locust coming out of its shell, and started twanging a guitar, as he extolled his potent mixtures, and his tooth-pulling forceps from the steps of his stand alongside the Drummers' Home Hotel.

In front of the little dingy tent of the Half-Man and Half-Horse a perspiring Negro sat on a split-bottom chair limbering up for a hard day. This Negro was an artist. He played a common twenty-cent mouth organ, using his left hand to slide it back and forth across his spread lips. The other hand held a pair of polished beef bones, and about the wrist was buckled a broad leather strap with three big sleigh-bells riveted loosely to the leather, so that he could clap the bones and shake the bells with the same motion.

He was a whole orchestra in himself. He could play on his mouth organ almost any tune you wanted, and with his bones and his bells to help out he could creditably imitate a church organ, a file-and-drum corps, or, indeed, a full brass band. He was practicing the newest of the ragtime airs to get that far South. The name of it was *The Georgia Camp-Meeting.*

And as he swayed with its rhythms the town marshal in his shirt sleeves, with a big silver shield pinned to the breast of his unbuttoned blue waistcoat, stalked the town drunkard, fair game at all seasons and especially on Court Monday.

The town gallant whirled back and forth the short hilly length of Main Street in his new sidebar buggy, and high up on the squat cupola of the courthouse a red-headed woodpecker clung, barred in crimson, white and blue-black like a bit of living bunting, the rolling rattle of his beak's tattoo coming down sharply to the crowd below.

Mourning doves called to one another in the trees round the square, and at ten o'clock, when the sun was high and hot, the sheriff emerged from the red-brick building and, standing between two hollow white pillars, rapped upon one of them with a stick and called upon all witnesses and talesmen to come into court for the trial of John Breckinridge Tandy, charged with murder in the first degree, against the peace and dignity of the commonwealth of Tennessee, and all its citizens.

But this ceremonial by the sheriff was for form rather than effect, since the witnesses and the talesmen all sat in the circuit-court chamber along with as

many of the population of Forked Deer County as could squeeze in there. Already the air of the crowded chamber was choky with heat and rancid with smell.

Men were perched precariously in the ledges of the windows and more were ranged in rows along the plastered walls, clunking their heels against the cracked wooden baseboards. The two front rows of benches were full of women, for this was to be the big case of the June term—a better show by long odds than the Half-Man and Half-Horse.

Inside the low railing that divided the room and on the side nearer the jury box were the forces of the defense. Under his skin the prisoner showed a sallow paleness born of his three months in the county jail. He was tall and dark and steady-eyed, a young man, well under thirty.

He gave no heed to those who sat in packed rows behind him, wishing him evil, but frequently his hand went out in a reassuring way to touch his wife's brown hair, or to rest a moment on her small shoulder. She was a plain, scared shrinking little thing, the fingers of her thin hand plaited desperately together in her lap. Already she was trembling and once in a while she would raise her face, showing shallow brown eyes dilated with fright and then sink her head again like a quail trying to hide. She looked pitiable and lonely.

Durham, the chief attorney for the defense, was half turned from the small counsel table where he might study the faces of the crowd. He was from Middle Indiana, serving his second term in Congress and everyone knew that if his party held control of the state he would go to the Senate after the next election. Durham was an orator of parts, and a pleader of almost national reputation. He was a fine, upstanding figure of a man, and before now he had wrung victories out of many difficult cases. But now he chilled to his fingernails with apprehensions of disaster as he glanced searchingly about the close-packed room.

Wherever he looked he saw no friendliness at all. He could feel the hostility of that crowd as though it had substance and body. It was a tangible thing; it was almost a physical thing. Why, you could almost put your hand out and touch it.

And it focussed and was summed up in the person of Aunt Tilly Haslett, rearing on the very front bench with her husband, Uncle Fayette, half hidden behind her vast and overflowing bulk. Aunt Tilly made public opinion in the town. In her it had its up-comings and its outflowings. Her jaw was set like a steel latch, and her little gray eyes behind her steel-bowed specs were leveled with a baleful, con-

demning glare that included the strange lawyer, his client, his client's wife, and all that was his client's.

Congressman Durham looked and knew that his presence was an affront to Aunt Tilly and all those who sat with her; that his somewhat vivid tie, his silken shirt, his new suit of gray flannels were as insults, added up and piled on, to this suspendered, gingham-shirted constituency. Better than ever he realized now the stark hopelessness of the task to which his hands were set. And he dreaded what was coming almost as much for himself as for the man he was hired to defend.

But he was a trained veteran of courtroom campaigns, and there was a jauntily assumed confidence in his bearing as he swung himself about and made a brisk show of conferring with the local attorney who was to aid him in the choosing of the jurors.

But it was real confidence and real jauntiness that radiated from the wing of the inclosure, where the prosecutor sat with the assembled bar of Forked Deer County on his flanks, volunteers upon the favored side, lending to it the moral support of weight and numbers. Rankin, the dead man, having been a bachelor, State's Attorney Tom Gilliam could bring no forlorn widow and children to mourn before the jurors' eyes and win added sympathy for his cause. Lacking these most valued assets of a murder trial he supplied their places with the sisters of the dead man —two sparse-built elderly women in heavy black, with sweltering thick veils down over their faces. When the proper time came he would have them raise these veils and show their woeful faces, but now they sat shrouded all in crepe, fit figures of desolation and sorrow.

He fussed about busily, a lank, bony garfish of a man, with a white goatee aggressively protruding from his lower lip. He was a poor speaker but mighty as a cross-examiner, and he was serving his first term and was a candidate for another. He felt the importance of his place here almost visibly and his figure swelled and expanded out his clothes.

"Look yonder at Tom Gilliam," said Mr. Lukins, the grocer, in tones of whispered admiration to his next-elbow neighbor, "just prunin' and honin' hisself to git at that there Tandy and his dude Yankee lawyer. If he don't chaw both of 'em up together I'll be dadburned."

"You bet," whispered back his neighbor—it was Aunt Tilly's oldest son, Fayette, Junior—"it's like Maw says, time's come to teach them murderin' Kintuckians they can't be a-comin' down here a-killin' up people and not pay for it. I reckon, Mr. Lukins," added Fayette, Junior, with a

wriggle of pleased anticipation, "we shore are goin' to see some carryin's-on in this cotehouse today."

Mr. Lukin's reply was lost because just then the judge entered —an elderly, kindly-looking man —from his chambers in the rear, with the circuit-court clerk right behind him bearing large leather-clad books and sheaves of foolscap paper.

The formalities of the opening of a term of court were soon over; there was everywhere manifest a haste to get at the big thing. The clerk called the case of the Commonwealth versus Tandy. Both sides were ready. Through the local lawyer, delegated for these smaller purposes, the accused man pleaded not guilty. The clerk spun the jury wheel, which was a painted wooden drum on a creaking wooden axle, and drew forth a slip of paper with the name of a talesman written upon it and read aloud:

"Isom W. Tolliver."

In an hour the jury was complete: two townsmen, a clerk and a telegraph operator, and ten men from the country—farmers mainly—and one blacksmith and one horse-trader. Three of the panel who owned up frankly to a fixed bias had been let go by consent of both sides. The others were accepted as they came.

The foreman was a brown-skinned, sparrow-hawk-looking old man, with a smoldering brown eye. He had spare, knotted hands, like talons and the right one was marred and twisted, with a sprayed bluish scar in the midst of the crippled knuckles like the mark of an old gunshot wound. Juror No. 4 was a stodgy old man, a small planter from the back part of the county, who fanned himself steadily with a brown-varnished straw hat. No. 7 was even older, a white-whiskered patriarch on crutches.

The twelfth juryman was the oldest of the twelve. He looked to be almost seventy, but he went into the box after he had sworn that his sight, hearing and general health were good and that he still could do his ten hours a day at his blacksmith shop. The juryman chewed tobacco without pause. Twice after he took his seat at the back end of the double line he tried for a wooden cuspidor ten feet away. Both were creditable attempts, but he missed each time. Seeing the look of gathering distress in his eyes the sheriff brought the cuspidor nearer, and thereafter No. 12 was content, chewing steadily like some bearded contemplative ruminant and listening attentively to the evidence.

It was late in the afternoon when the prosecution rested its case and court adjourned until the following morning. The state's attorney had not had so very much evidence to offer, real-

ly—the testimony of one who heard the single shot and ran in at Rankin's door to find Rankin upon the floor, dying, with an unfired pistol in his hand and Tandy standing against the wall with a still smoking pistol in his hand; the constable to whom Tandy surrendered; the physician who examined the body; the persons who knew of the quarrel between Tandy and Rankin growing out of a land deal into which they had gone partners—not much, but enough for Gilliam's purposes.

Once in the midst of examining a witness the state's attorney, seemingly by accident, let his look fall upon the two black-robed, silent figures at his side, and as if overcome by the sudden realization of a great grief, he faltered and stopped dead and sank down. It was an old trick, but well done, and a little humming murmur like a breeze coming through treetops swept the audience.

Durham was sick in his soul as he came away. In his mind, there stood the picture of a little, scared woman's drawn face. She had started crying before the last juror was chosen, and thereafter all day, at half-minute intervals, the big, hard sobs had racked her. As Durham came down the steps he had almost to shove his way through a knot of hostile natives outside the doors.

At the Drummers' Home Hotel a Negro waiter sustained a profound shock when the important lawyer declined fried beefsteak with fried potatoes, insisting only on a glass of milk for his supper. He drank it and smoked a cigar, and about dusk he went upstairs to his room. There he found assembled the forlorn rank and file of the defense, the local lawyer, and three character witnesses—prominent citizens from Tandy's home town who were to testify to his good repute in the place where he had been born and reared.

These would be the only witnesses, except Tandy himself, whom Durham meant to call. One of them was a bustling little man named Felsburg, a clothing merchant, and another was Colonel Quigley, a banker and an ex-mayor, and the third was a Judge Priest, who sat on a circuit-court bench back in Kentucky. In contrast to his size, which was considerable, this remarkable man had a voice that was high and whiny. He also had the trick, common to many men in politics in his part of the South, of being purposely ungrammatical at times.

This mannerism led a lot of people into thinking that the judge must be an uneducated man—until they heard him charging a jury or reading one of his rulings. The judge had other peculiarities. In conversa-

tion he nearly always called men younger than himself, son. He drank a little bit too much sometimes; and nobody had even beaten him for any office he coveted. Durham didn't know what to make of this old judge—sometimes he seemed simple-minded to the point of childishness.

The others were gathered about a table by a lighted kerosene lamp, but the old judge sat at an open window with his low-quarter shoes off, and his white-socked feet propped against the ledge, industriously stoking at a home-made corncob pipe. From the rocky little street below the clatter of departing farm teams came up to him. The Indian medicine doctor was taking down his big white umbrella and packing up his regalia, and the late canvas habitat of the Half-Man and Half-Horse had been struck and was gone, leaving only the pole-holes in the turf and a trodden space to show where it had stood. Court would go on all week, but Court Monday was over and for another month the town would doze along peacefully.

Durham slumped himself into a chair that screeched protestingly in all its infirm joints. The heart was gone clean out of him.

"I don't understand these people at all," he confessed. "We're beating against a stone wall with our bare hands."

"If it should be money that you're needing, Mr. Durham," spoke up Felsburg, "that boy Tandy's father was my very good friend when I first walked into that town with a peddling pack on my back, and if it should be money—?"

"It isn't money, Mr. Felsburg," said Durham. "If I didn't get a cent I'd still fight this case out to the end for the sake of that game boy and that pitiful little wife of his. It isn't money or the lack of it. It's the damned hate they've built up here against the man. Why, you could cut it off in chunks. The prejudice that there was in that courthouse today—"

"Son," put in Judge Priest in his high, weedy voice, "I reckon maybe you're right. I've been projectin' around cotehouses a good many years, and I've taken notice that when a jury looks at a prisoner all the time and never looks at his women folks it's a monstrous bad sign. And that's the way it was all day today."

"The judge will be fair—he always is," said Hightower, the local lawyer, "and of course Tom Gilliam is only doing his duty. Those jurors are as good solid men as you can find in this country anywhere. But they can't help being prejudiced. Human nature's not strong enough to stand out against the feeling that's grown up round here against Tandy since he shot Ab Rankin."

"Son," said Judge Priest, still with his eyes on the darkening square below, "about how many of them jurors would you say are old soldiers?"

"Four or five that I know of," said Hightower, "and maybe more. It's hard to find a man over fifty years old in this section that didn't see active service in the Big War."

"Ah, hah," said Judge Priest with a squeaky little grunt. "That foreman now—*he* looked like he might of seen some fightin'?"

"Four years of it," said Hightower. "He came out a captain in the cavalry."

"Ah, hah." Judge Priest sucked at his pipe. "Herman," he wheezed back over his shoulder to Felsburg, "did you notice a tall sort of a saddle-colored lad playing a juice harp in front of that there side-show as we came along up. I reckon that boy could play almost any tune you'd a mind to hear him play?"

At a time like this Durham was distinctly not interested in the versatilities of strange Negroes in this corner of the world. He kept silent, shrugging his shoulders impatiently.

"I wonder now is that boy left town yet?" mused the old judge half to himself.

"I saw him just a while ago going down toward the old depot," said Hightower. "There's a train out of here for Memphis at eight-thirty. It's about twenty minutes of that now."

"Ah, hah, jest about," said the judge. When Judge Priest said "Ah, hah!" like that it sounded like the striking of a fiddle-bow across a fiddle's tautened E-string.

"Well, boys," he went on, "we've all got to do the best we can for Breck Tandy, ain't we? Say, son"—this was aimed at Durham—"I'd like mightily for you to put me on the stand the last one tomorrow. You wait until you're through with Herman and Colonel Quigley here, before you call me. And if I should seem to ramble somewhat in giving my testimony—why, son, you just let me ramble, will you?"

"Judge Priest," said Durham tartly, "if you think it could possibly do any good, ramble all you like."

"Much obliged," said the old judge, and he struggled into his low-quartered shoes and stood up, dusting the tobacco fluff off himself.

"Herman, have you got any loose change about you?"

Felsburg nodded and reached into his pocket. The judge made a discriminating selection of silver and bills from the handful that the merchant extended to him across the table.

"I'll take about ten dollars," he said. "I didn't come down here with more than enough to jest about buy my railroad ticket

and pay my bill at this here tavern, and I might want a sweetenin' dram or somethin'."

He pouched his loan and crossed the room.

"Boys," he said, "I think I'll be knockin' round a little before I turn in. Herman, I may stop by your room a minute as I come back in. You boys better turn in early and git yourselves a good night's sleep. We are all liable to be tolerable busy tomorrow."

After he was outside he put his head back in the door and said to Durham, "Remember, son, I may ramble."

Durham nodded shortly, being somewhat put out by the vagaries of a mind that could concern itself with trivial things on the imminent eve of a crisis.

As the judge creaked ponderously along the hall and down the stairs he whistled a tune to himself, making false starts at the air and halting often to correct his meter. It was an unknown tune to Durham, but to Felsburg, the oldest of the four, it brought a vague, unplaced memory.

The old judge was whistling when he reached the street. He stood there a minute until he had mastered the tune to his own satisfaction, and then, still whistling, he shuffled along the uneven board pavement, which, after rippling up and down like a broken-backed snake, dipped downward to a little railroad station at the foot of the street.

In the morning nearly half the town—the white half—came to the trial, and enough of the black half to put a dark hem, like a mourning border, across the back width of the courtroom.

The defense lost no time getting under headway. As his main witness, Durham called the prisoner to testify in his own behalf. Tandy gave his version of the killing with a frankness and directness that would have carried conviction to auditors more even-minded in their sympathies. He had gone to Rankin's office in the hope of bringing on a peaceful settlement of their quarrel. Rankin had flared up; had cursed him and advanced on him, making threats. Both of them reached for their guns then. Rankin's was the first out, but Tandy had fired first—that was all there was to it.

Gilliam shone at cross-examination; he went at Tandy savagely, taking hold like a snapping turtle and hanging on like one. He made Tandy admit over and over again that he carried a pistol habitually. In a community where a third of the male adult population went armed this admission was nevertheless taken as plain evidence of a nature bloody-minded and desperate.

It would have been just as bad for Tandy if he had said he armed himself especially for his visit to Rankin—to these listeners that could have meant nothing

else but a deliberate murderous intention. Either way Gilliam had him, and he sweated in his eagerness to bring out the significance of the point. A sinister little murmuring sound, vibrant with menace, went purring from bench to bench when Tandy told about his pistol-carrying habit.

The cross-examination dragged along for hours. The recess for dinner interrupted it. Then it went on again, Gilliam worrying at Tandy, goading at him, catching him up and twisting his words. Tandy would not be shaken, but twice under the manhandling he lost his temper and lashed back at Gilliam, which was precisely what Gilliam most desired. A flary, fiery man, prone to violent outbursts—that was the only inference that could be drawn from these blaze-ups.

It was getting on toward five o'clock before Gilliam finally let his bedeviled enemy quit the witness-stand and go back to his place between his wife and his lawyer.

As for Durham, he had little more to offer. He called on Mr. Felsburg, and Mr. Felsburg gave Tandy a good name as man and boy in his home town. He called on Banker Quigley, who did the same thing in different words. For these character witnesses State's Attorney Gilliam had few questions. The case was as good as won now, he figured. He could taste already his victory over the famous lawyer from up North, and he was greedy to hurry it forward.

The hot round hub of the sun had wheeled low enough to dart its thin red spokes in through the westerly windows when Durham called his last witness.

As Judge Priest settled himself solidly in the witness chair with the deliberation of age and the heft of flesh, the leveled rays caught him full, lighting up his round pink face, with the short white-bleached beard below it and the bald white-bleached forehead above.

Durham eyed him half doubtfully. He looked the image of a scatter-witted old man, who would potter and philander round a long time before he ever came to the point of anything. But what Durham did not sense was that the old man's homely simplicity was of a piece with the picture of the courtroom, that he would seem to these watching, hostile people one of their own kind, and that they would give to him in all likelihood a sympathy and understanding that had been denied the clothing merchant and the broadclothed banker.

He wore a black alpaca coat that slanted upon him in deep, longitudinal folds, and his shapeless gray trousers were short for him and fitted his pudgy legs closely. Below them dangled a pair of stout ankles encased in

white cotton socks and ending in low-quarter black shoes. His shirt was clean but wrinkled countlessly over his front. The gnawed and blackened end of a cane pipestem stood out of his breast pocket, rising like a frosted weed stalk.

He settled himself back in the capacious oak chair, balanced upon his knees a white straw hat with a string band round the crown and waited for the question.

"What is your name?" asked Durham.

"William Pitman Priest."

Even the voice somehow seemed to fit the setting. Its high nasal note had a sort of whimsical appeal to it.

"When and where were you born?"

"In Calloway County, Kintucky, July twenty-seven, eighteen thirty-nine."

"What is your profession or business?"

"I am an attorney-at-law."

"What position if any do you hold in your native state?"

"I am presidin' judge of the first judicial district of the state of Kintucky."

"And have you been so long?"

"For the past sixteen years," said Judge Priest.

"When were you admitted to the bar?"

"In eighteen-sixty."

"And you have ever since been engaged, I take it, either in the practice of the law before the bar or in its administration from the bench?"

"Exceptin' for the four years from April, eighteen-sixty-one, to June, eighteen-sixty-five."

Up until now Durham had been sparring, trying to fathom the probable trend of the old judge's expected meanderings. But in the answer to the last question he thought he caught the cue and, though none save those two knew it, thereafter it was the witness who led and the questioner who followed his lead blindly.

"And where were you during those four years?"

"I was engaged, suh, in takin' part in the war."

"Did I understand you to say the War of the Rebellion?"

"No, suh," the old man corrected him gently but with firmness, "the War for the Southern Confederacy."

There was a least bit of a stir at this. Aunt Tilly's tape-edged palmleaf blade hovered a brief second in the wide regular arc of its sweep and the foreman of the jury involuntarily ducked his head, as if in affiance of an indubitable fact.

"Ahem!" said Durham, still feeling his way, although now he saw the path more clearly. "And on which side were you engaged?"

"I was a private soldier in the Southern army," the old judge

answered him, and as he spoke he straightened up.

"Yes, suh," he repeated, "for four years I was a private soldier in the late Southern Confederacy. Part of the time I was down here in this very country," he went on as though he had just recalled that part of it. "Why, in the summer of sixty-four I was right here in this town. And until yistiddy I hadn't been back since."

Judge Priest turned to the trial judge and spoke to him with a tone and manner half apologetic, half confidential.

"Your Honor," he said, "I am a judge myself, occupyin' in my home state a position very similar to the one which you fill here, and whilst I realize, none better, that this ain't all accordin' to the rules of evidence as laid down in the books, yet when I get to thinkin' about them old soldierin' times I find I am inclined to sort of reminiscence round a little. And I trust your Honor will pardon me if I should seem to ramble slightly?"

His tone was more than apologetic and more than confidential. It was winning. The judge upon the bench was a veteran himself. He looked toward the prosecutor.

"Has the state's attorney any objection to this line of testimony?" he asked, smiling a little.

Certainly Tom Gilliam had no fear that this honest-appearing old man's wanderings could damage a case already as good as won. He smiled back indulgently and waved his arm with a gesture that was compounded of equal parts of toleration and patience, with a top-dressing of contempt.

"I fail," said Gilliam, "to see wherein the military history and achievements of this worthy gentleman can possibly affect the issue of the homicide of Abner J. Rankin. But," he added magnanimously, "if the defense chooses to encumber the record with matters so trifling and irrelevant I surely will make no objection now or hereafter."

"The witness may proceed," said the judge.

"Well, really, Your Honor, I didn't have so very much to say," confessed Judge Priest, "and I didn't expect there'd be any to-do made over it. What I was trying to git at was that comin' down here to testify in this case sort of brought back them old days to my mind. As I git along more in years—" he was looking toward the jurors now—"I find that I live more and more in the past."

As though he had put a question to them several of the jurors gravely inclined their heads. The busy cud of Juror No. 12 moved just a trifle slower in its travels from the right side of the jaw to the left and back again.

"Yes, suh," Judge Priest said musingly, "I got up early this mornin' at the tavern where I'm

stoppin' and took a walk through your thrivin' little city." This was rambling with a vengeance, thought the puzzled Durham. "I walked down here to a bridge over a little creek and back again. It reminded me mightily of that other time when I passed through this town—in sixty-four—just about this season of the year—and it was hot early today just as it was that other time—and the dew was thick on the grass, the same as 'twas then."

He halted a moment.

"Of course your town didn't look the same this mornin' as it did that other mornin'. It seemed like to me there are twicet as many houses here now as there used to be—it's got to be quite a little city."

Mr. Lukins, the grocer, nodded silent approval of this utterance, Mr. Lukins having but newly completed and moved into a two-story brick store building with a tin cornice and an outside staircase.

"Yes, suh, your town has grown mightily, but"—and the whiny, humorous voice grew apologetic again—but your roads are purty much the same as they were in sixty-four—hilly in places and kind of rocky."

Durham found himself sitting still, listening hard. Everybody else was listening too. Suddenly it struck Durham, almost like a blow, that this simple old man had somehow laid a sort of spell upon them all. The flattening sunrays made a kind of pink glow about the old judge's face, touching gently his bald head and his white whiskers.

"I remember about those roads particularly well," Judge Priest droned on, "because that time when I marched through here in sixty-four my feet was about out of my shoes and them flints cut 'em up some. Some of the boys, I recollect, left bloody prints in the dust behind 'em. But shucks—it wouldn't a-made no real difference if we'd wore the bottoms plumb off our feet! We'd a-kept on goin'. We'd a-gone anywhere—or tried to—behind old Bedford Forrest."

Aunt Tilly's palm leaf halted in the air and the twelfth juror's quid froze in his cheek and stuck there like a small wen. Except for a general hunching forward of shoulders and heads there was no movement anywhere and no sound except the voice of the witness:

"Old Bedford Forrest hisself was leadin' us, and so naturally we just went along with him, shoes or no shoes. There was a regiment of Northern troops—Yankees—marchin' on this town that mornin', and it seemed the word had traveled ahead of 'em that they was aimin' to burn it down.

"Probably it wasn't true. When we got to know them Yankees better afterward we

found out that there really wasn't no difference, to speak of, between the run of us and the run of them. But in them days the people were prone to believe 'most anything about Yankees and the word was that they was comin' across country, a-burnin' and cuttin' and slashin', and the people here thought they was going to be burned out of house and home. So old Bedford Forrest he marched all night with a battalion of us—four companies—Kintuckians and Tennesseeans mostly, with a sprinklin' of boys from Mississippi and Arkansas—some of us ridin' and some walkin' afoot, like me—we didn't always have horses enough to go round that last year. And somehow we got here before they did.

"It was a close race though between us—them a-comin' down from the North and us a-comin' up from the other way. We met 'em down there by that little branch just below where your present railroad depot is. There wasn't no depot there then, but the branch looks just the same now as it did then—and the bridge too. I walked acros't it this mornin' to see. Yes, suh, right there was where we met 'em. And there was a right smart fight.

"Yes, suh, there was a right smart fight for about twenty minutes—or maybe twenty-five—and then we had breakfast."

He had been smiling gently as he went along. Now he broke into a throaty little chuckle.

"Yes, suh, it all come back to me this mornin'—every little bit of it—the breakfast and all. I didn't have much breakfast, though, as I recall—none of us did—probably just corn pone and branch water to wash it down with." And he wiped his mouth with the back of his hand as though the taste of the gritty cornmeal cakes was still there.

There was another little pause here; the witness seemed to be through. Durham's crisp question cut the silence like a gash with a knife.

"Judge Priest, do you know the defendant at the bar, and if so, how well do you know him?"

"I was just comin' to that," he answered with simplicity, "and I'm obliged to you for puttin' me back on the track. Oh, I know the defendant at the bar mighty well—as well as anybody on earth ever did know him, I reckon, unless 'twas his own maw and paw. I've known him, in fact, from the time he was born—and a gentler, better-disposed boy never grew up in our town. His nature seemed almost too sweet for a boy—more like a girl's—but as a grown man he was always manly, and honest, and fair, and not quarrelsome.

"Oh, yes, I know him. I knew his father and his mother before him. It's a funny thing too—

comin' up this way—but I remember that his paw was marchin' right alongside of me the day we came through here in sixty-four. He was wounded, his paw was, right at the edge of that little creek down yonder. He was wounded in the shoulder—and he never did entirely git over it."

Durham looked pleased.

Again Judge Priest stopped dead short, and he lifted his hand and tugged at the lobe of his right ear absently. Simultaneously Mr. Felsburg, who was sitting close to a window beyond the jury box, was also seized with nervousness, for he jerked out a handkerchief and with it mopped his brow so vigorously that, to one standing outside, it might have seemed that the handkerchief was actually being waved about as a signal.

Instantly then there broke upon the pause that still endured a sudden burst of music, a rollicking, jingling air. It was only a twenty-cent mouth organ, three sleigh bells and a pair of rib bones of a beef-cow being played all at once by a saddle-colored Negro man but it sounded for all the world like a fife-and-drum corps:

If you want to have a good time,
If you want to have a good time,
If you want to have a good time,
If you want to ketch the devil—
Jine the cavalree!

To some who heard it now the tune was strange; these were the younger ones. But to those older men and the older women the first jubilant bars rolled back the years like a scroll.

If you want to have a good time,
If you want to have a good time,
If you want to have a good time,
If you want to ride with Bedford—
Jine the cavalree!

The sound swelled and rippled and rose through the windows—the marching song of the Southern trooper—Forest's men, and Morgan's and Jeb Stuart's and Joe Wheeler's. It had in it the jingle of saber chains, the creak of sweaty saddle-girths, the nimble clunk of hurrying hoofs.

It had in it the clanging memories of a cause and a time that would live with these people as long as they lived and their children lived and their children's children. It had in it the one sure call to the emotions and the sentiments of these people.

And it rose and rose and then as the unseen minstrel went slouching down Main Street, toward the depot and the creek,

it sank lower and became a thin thread of sound, and then a broken thread of sound, and then it died out altogether and once more there was silence in the courthouse of Forked Deer County.

Strangely enough not one listener had come to the windows to look out. The interruption from without had seemed part and parcel of what went on within. None faced to the rear, every one faced to the front.

There was Mr. Lukins now. As Mr. Lukins got upon his feet he said to himself in a tone of feeling that he be dad-fetched. But immediately changing his mind he stated that he would preferably be dad-blamed, and as he moved toward the bar rail one over-hearing him might have gathered from remarks let fall that Mr. Lukins was going somewhere with the intention of being extensively dad-burned. But for all these threats Mr. Lukins didn't go anywhere, except as near the railing as he could press.

Nearly everybody else was standing up too. The state's attorney was on his feet with the rest, seemingly for the purpose of making some protest.

Had anyone looked they might have seen that the ember in the smoldering eye of the old foreman had blazed up to a brown fire; that Juror No. 4, with utter disregard for expense, was biting segments out of the brim of his new brown-varnished straw hat; that No. 7 had dropped his crutches on the floor, and that no one, not even their owner, had heard them fall; that all the jurors were half out of their chairs.

But no one saw these things, for at this moment there rose up Aunt Tilly Haslett, a dominant figure, her huge wide back blocking the view of three or four immediately behind her.

Uncle Fayette laid a timid detaining hand upon her and seemed to be saying something protestingly.

"Turn lose of me, Fate Haslett!" she commanded. "Ain't you ashamed of yourse'f, to be tryin' to hold me back when you know how my only dear brother died a-followin' after Gineral Nathan Bedford Forrest. Turn loose of me!"

She flirted her great arm and Uncle Fayette spun flutteringly into the mass behind.

The sheriff barred her way to the gate of the bar. "Miz Haslett," he implored, "please, Mizz Haslett—you must keep order in the cote."

Aunt Tilly halted in her onward move, head up high and elbows out, and through her specs, blazing like burning-glasses, she fixed on him a look that instantly charred that unhappy official into a burning red ruin of his own self-importance.

"Keep it yourse'f, High Sheriff Washington Nash, Esquire," she bade him, "that's whut you git paid good money for doin'. And git out of my way! I'm a'goin' in there to that pore little lonesome thing settin' there all by herself, and there ain't nobody goin' to hinder me neither!"

The sheriff shrunk aside; perhaps it would be better to say he evaporated aside. And public opinion, reorganized and made over but still incarnate to Aunt Tilly Haslett, swept past the rail and settled like a billowing dark cloud into a chair that the local attorney for the defense vacated just in time to save himself the inconvenience of having it snatched bodily from under him.

"There, honey," said Aunt Tilly crooningly as she gathered the little figure of the prisoner's wife in her arms like a child and mothered her up to her ample bosom. "There now, honey, you jest cry on me."

Then Aunt Tilly looked up and her specs were all blurry and wet. But she waved her palm leaf fan as though it had been the baton of a marshal.

"Now, Jedge," she said, addressing the bench, "and you other gentlemen—you kin go ahead now."

The state's attorney had meant evidently to make some sort of an objection, for Tom Gilliam was upon his feet through all this scene. But he looked back before he spoke and what he saw kept him from speaking. So he settled back down in his chair and stretched out his legs and buried his chin in the top of his limp white waistcoat in an attitude that he had once seen in a picture entitled, 'Napoleon Bonaparte at St. Helena.'

"You may resume, Judge Priest," said the trial judge in a voice that was not entirely free from huskiness, although its owner had been clearing it steadily for some moments.

"Thank you kindly, suh, but I was about through anyhow," answered the witness with a bow, and for all his homeliness there was dignity and stateliness in it. "I merely wanted to say for the sake of completin' the record, so to speak, that on the occasion referred to them Yankees did not cross that bridge."

With the air of tendering and receiving congratulations, Mr. Lukins turned to his nearest neighbor and shook hands with him warmly.

The witness got up somewhat stiffly, once more becoming a commonplace old man in a wrinkled black alpaca coat, and made his way back to his vacant place, now in the shadow of Aunt Tilly Haslett's form.

As he passed along the front of the jury box the foreman's crippled right hand came up in a sort of a clumsy salute, and the juror at the other end of the

rear row—No. 12, the oldest juror—leaned forward as if to speak to him, but remembered in time where his present duty lay. The old judge kept on until he came to Durham's side and he whispered to him:

"Son, they've quit lookin' at him and they're all a-lookin' at her. Son, rest your case."

Durham came out of a maze.

"Your Honor," he said as he arose, "the defense rests."

The jury were out only six minutes. Mr. Lukins insisted that it was only five minutes and a half, and added that he'd be dadrotted if it was a second longer than that.

As the lately accused Tandy came out of the courthouse with his imported lawyer—Aunt Tilly bringing up the rear with his trembling, weeping, happy little wife—friendly hands were outstretched to clasp his and a whiskered old gentleman with a thumbnail like a Brazil nut grabbed at his arm.

"Whichaway did Billy Priest go?" he demanded. "Little old Fightin' Billy—whar did he go to? Soon as he started in talkin' I placed him. Whar is he?"

Walking side by side, Tandy and Durham came down the steps into the soft June night, and Tandy took a long, deep breath into his lungs.

"Mr. Durham," he said, "I owe a great deal to you."

"How's that?" said Durham.

Just ahead of them, centered in a shaft of light from the window of the barroom of the Drummers' Home Hotel, stood Judge Priest. The old judge had been drinking. The pink of his face was a trifle more pronounced, the high whine in his voice a trifle weedier, as he counted one by one certain pieces of silver into a wide-open palm of a saddle-colored Negro.

"How's that?" said Durham.

"I say I owe everything in the world to you," repeated Tandy.

"No," said Durham, "what you owe me is the fee you agreed to pay me for defending you. There's the man you're looking for."

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sign of the seven

by . . . John Hunter

On English downs where Roman legions marched the dark roots of crime's vengeance trace out a grim symbol—the Sign of the Seven.

IN SETTING DOWN the final chapters in the history of that notorious organization known to the police of two continents as The Seven, it is difficult to indicate the full extent of its crimes without devoting a large amount of space to a dark and dreadful record.

There were many cold-blooded murders. The Seven it was who smashed the Southern Consolidated strong room and ruthlessly shot and killed Hawkins, the caretaker, and his wife. The great liner 'City of Chichester' inexplicably lost in calm weather somewhere between Gibraltar and Plymouth, might have told a harrowing story of her sinking in which The Seven would have appeared. Arson, rum-running, burglary, murder . . . they ran the entire gamut of crime.

The British government appointed Captain Langley of the Secret Service to hunt them down. But they laughed at his efforts and continued their operations until that night at Halverson's when Halverson himself

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John Hunter is an English novelist and short-story writer whose work has appeared in many magazines on both sides of the Atlantic. It is in the mystery-story field that he has perhaps won his widest measure of acclaim but he has written a fine Western novel too (Ballantine Books) and gone adventuring in other realms of fiction. To this, as to all of his stories, he brings the highly exciting inventiveness of an accomplished craftsman.

pulled a gun, and ended the activities of the organization.

Halverson was second in command of The Seven—No. 2. The chief of The Seven—No. 1—was not present. There was a question of division of loot. The Seven had a vast reserve account which it seemed opportune to divide.

Halverson did the dividing—with an automatic. To each of those men in that room his words were the last they heard before the boom of the pistol shocked the close air of the death chamber.

Halverson vanished, and with Halverson went the great reserve account of The Seven. Halverson was immensely rich, and somewhere in the world was No. 1, the Chief, searched for by the police, himself searching for Halverson.

Two years passed.

At the end of those two years a man was found dead in an attic in Madrid. By his side was a confession to the effect that the dead man was No. 1, the leader of The Seven, and that it had been he who had instigated the crimes which had made the organization notorious.

This, briefly, sets out the salient points in the history of The Seven down to the days when it seemed that Halverson stood alone, the sole survivor of the gang, possessor of evilly-gotten wealth; down to the days when the man who called himself Phillips purchased Red Roofs, that great and beautiful house standing on the southern slopes of the South Downs and overlooking the sunlit champaign which, if Swinburne may be paraphrased, declines in peace that the sea's light crowns.

So we reach the final chapters in the grim story, and those, perhaps the most surprising of all.

I

The man who called himself Phillips wore a wig. It was a gray wig, waved meticulously after the manner invented by a famous French coiffeur. With it went a pair of tinted glasses which seemed to magnify and darken the eyes of Phillips, so that they were great pools of swimming light seen dimly.

He seemed to have plenty of money. Red Roofs was, as the village folk said, not bought for nothing. The house presented a red facade all cloaked with ivy before a flight of wide steps dropping down to green, age-old lawns. Its twisted chimneys stood picturesque against a sun-filled sky; its mullion-leaded windows hinted at rooms shadowed and in repose, cloisters of quiet shut away from the turmoil of the twentieth century.

Phillips bought Red Roofs two weeks after the discovery of that dead man in the attic in Madrid.

A week after Phillips had begun to live at Red Roofs, Kitty McLeod traveled there to see him. Kitty lived in a bachelor flat in Kensington and made her living by selling pictures to illustrated magazines. Flaxen-haired, blue-eyed, and delightfully feminine, Kitty usually seemed surprised to find that editors demanded more than a glimpse of a beauty which surely should have set the heart of any man throbbing, and asked only for pictures which would satisfy their readers. It was, Kitty reflected, a startling commentary on the decadence of masculine appreciation of the beautiful works of nature.

She caught the six-forty from Victoria, which delivered her just after eight o'clock at Worthing-station, and she demanded of a taxi driver his charge for running her out to Red Roofs.

The taxi driver hurled his massive intelligence from a condition of coma into the sphere of intense financial activity, and said: "It's a long way, Miss—on the other side of Cissbury, and off the main road. He paused. "I'll do it for a quid and it won't pay me."

"Neither shall I," said Kitty. "It's only a mile or two out. I know it's near Findon, and Findon's on the London road. I'll give you ten shillings."

The taxi driver took a deep breath, and eyed Kitty curiously. He observed her softness, her wonder, her rich red lips, and her wide blue eyes, and told himself in bitter resignation that: "You could never tell a woman by her looks."

Some twenty minutes later, Kitty was in the library at Red Roofs talking to Phillips. The heavy curtains had been drawn, the door was locked, and on the desk lay the curled gray wig and the tinted glasses.

Phillips, who stood over by the fireplace, was disclosed as a man of about thirty-five, tall, dark and not unhandsome in a strong, rugged fashion, with the white line of a great scar showing above his left ear.

"Why did you come?" he said. "It's too utterly absurd and dangerous."

Kitty eyed him steadily. "It's because it's dangerous that I came. I think you want somebody else with you, somebody on whom you can absolutely rely."

"Meaning you?" he asked, his hard lips curving a little.

"Exactly."

He shrugged his shoulders, and took a cigarette from a box nearby without taking his eyes from her face.

"I shouldn't have told you I was coming here," he said. "I should have just vanished, without leaving an address."

Kitty stood up. "I'm not quite sure whether you're deliberately

cruel, or just trying to be considerate."

"Cruel?" He echoed the word, staring hard at her. What did she mean by that? Cruel . . . It was a strong word to employ in describing what he considered a perfectly justifiable and quite minor deception.

Under his reproachful stare she flushed crimson. Her fingers twisted nervously and the Kitty who had dealt so calmly with the avaricious taxi driver vanished completely.

She suddenly said: "Dangerous isn't the word, Jim. It's death waiting for you around every corner. You're alone here with nobody . . ." She broke off.

Phillips laughed quietly. "We won't get melodramatic, Kitty. I'm sure I don't know why you're making all this fuss. I never imagined that a few dances, a few dinners would engender such anxiety."

"Jim, you mustn't talk like that." Kitty's lips trembled. "Why, I've known you nearly all my life. I know all your history, everything . . ."

"Ah!" he nodded. "Of course. I nearly forgot how much you do know. Well, you see me as I am, calling myself Phillips, living here in solitary grandeur, and possibly in peril, as you say. Don't you suppose I've weighed the risks carefully?"

She stamped her foot. "Jim! Don't be so confident! You told me yourself that the man they found in the attic in Madrid wasn't Number One. You were sure of it. You said that it was a trick to bring—"

"Say it," said Phillips. "The door is locked, the windows are fastened. We are completely alone. Say that it was a trick to bring Halverson into the open."

"It was," said Kitty lamely. "There—there was that clue you left behind, which Number One is sure to find. He will trace you here. Jim, I'm afraid!"

Phillips examined his cigarette, and regarded her furtively, realizing how completely he had been deceived by her unpredictable impulsiveness.

"You can't stay here," he said suddenly. "You can't possibly remain in this house. I'll arrange for you to be taken back to Worthing, where you can catch a train."

"At this time of night? You're more than considerate, Jim."

"There's a train up to town at ten-twenty-eight," he said, almost brutally.

"Which probably entails a change at Brighton which won't get it to London until after midnight. I'm glad I traveled all this way to be with you. You are so admirably grateful, so understanding!"

There might have been the slightest of humorous glints in his eyes as he surveyed her flushed and angry beauty.

"Now look here, Kitty. You've just said the word—understanding. You and I are old pals, and we should understand each other. This is my pigeon. I started it, whether for good or ill, and I intend to finish it by myself. It concerns me and Number One—and we fight alone. You shan't sit in anywhere on the game."

She saw his lips harden. "I'll go back," she said, too steadily for naturalness. "Of course, I was a little fool to come. I ought to have known—understood *is* the word, isn't it?"

He inclined his head gravely.

She added, "My bag's in the hall. I'll go immediately."

Five minutes later she was departing in Phillips' Rolls Royce, staring almost tearfully out the car window at the great avenue of trees which terminated at the lodge gates. The big car passed through the gates, and gathered speed, and they were soon at Worthing Station.

"You need not wait," she told the chauffeur.

He drove off, and Kitty stood resolutely on the steps of the station. She lifted her hand, and a taxi rattled to the foot of the steps.

"Can you recommend a good hotel in Worthing?" she asked of the driver.

"Yes, madam. The Burlingham. It's on the front—"

"Drive me there," said Kitty.

She booked a room at the Burlingham for an indefinite period.

II

After Kitty had left him, Phillips returned to the library. It was when he had shut the door of the room that he was aware of an unusual sound, a sound which a moment's pause enabled him to identify as an irregular tapping at the window.

He stood quite still for a second, his hand resting on the knob of the door. Then, with a quick silent movement, he pulled a gun from his pocket.

Mysteriously the tapping ceased, only to be renewed after a moment; and more heavily. It seemed to fill the room with sound.

He had now noiselessly worked his way along the bookcases to the wall angle, and abruptly he stepped across the space separating him from the outer edge of the great curtains. Very gently he lifted the curtain away from the window frame, and peered through the narrow slit.

He could not see clearly, for he stood in light and gazed into darkness. But he could make out the dark shimmer of the glass, the blackness of the park beyond. No shadow seemed to stand between him and his view of the park.

He held the curtain still for an instant, his thumb on the safety

catch of his pistol, and suddenly the cause of the tapping ceased to be a mystery.

Into one of the cross pieces of the window frame a screw or nail had been driven from the outside—most probably a screw, as a nail would have entailed hammering. From this, at the end of a piece of string, depended a brass article. It was a number such as might have been bought at any iron-monger's for affixing to the front doors of houses, and the number was seven.

Phillips allowed the curtain to drop into place. Tapping at his window was The Sign of Seven. No. 1 had found him!

He left the brass number where it was. He was sure now that outside in the dark night was waiting a man who had never missed a target, and that to outline himself against the window while he detached that infernal number from its fastening would be committing suicide.

He turned to the sideboard and helped himself to a drink, considered for a moment, then from one of the bookcases he removed a slender volume and settled down to read—facing towards the window.

The tapping went on as the wind drove across the park—intermittently rising and dying away. Phillips remained alert and outwardly composed, the gun across his knees. At eleven o'clock he went to his bedroom and lay down, fully dressed on the bed, still with the book and the pistol.

At two o'clock in the morning a man scaled the further wall of the great park, snaked swiftly through the trees, and ducked into shadows at the edge of the lawn belt directly in front of the house. He stood on the edge of the tree-shaded blackness and considered the lawns and the house speculatively—a man of average height, lean and strong in build, and prematurely gray over the ears. His clothing was mud-spattered and careless, as though he had traveled far afoot.

When at last he stirred, his movement was swift. He broke into a sprint which carried him across the lawns like a fleeting shadow, and brought him to a standstill in the shelter of the house wall. There he stayed flattened for a space, looking about him and listening intently.

Satisfied that he remained unobserved, he proceeded cautiously to the walls of the house, reaching each window and examining it in turn, trying it gently, but not lingering if he found it fastened. So at last he came to the window of the library, where still the brass number swung and tapped in the wind.

The man stared up at it for an instant in silence. Then he reached up, snatched at it, tore it from its fastening—and examined it with shaking fingers.

A little low cry came from his lips. The brass number slid through his nerveless fingers and dropped unheeded to the dew-soaked grass. His hand went furtively to his lips, and an uncontrollable trembling seized him.

He turned and, without attempting to make his flight inconspicuous, tore across the lawns into the tree belt, and, lurching, gained the wall and the lane beyond.

About this time the telephone at Phillips' bedside rang, and answering it instantly, he listened to what the man at the other end of the wire had to say. When he had completed his reply, terse, couched in terms which his caller could not possibly misunderstand, he hung up the receiver, and turned to his book again.

But he could not read. The words of the telephone message rang still in his ears, its chillingly ominous information mocking him like a gallow's rope swinging in the wind.

For the telephone had told him that his danger had been increased beyond reckoning, and that he stood on the brink of death.

III

During her first night at the Burlingham, when The Sign of Seven tapped at Phillips' window, and the mysterious man came through the trees with evil intent, Kitty made up her mind that she would stay in the vicinity of Red Roofs.

The decision called for the humbling of pride, and the subjugation of a natural resentment against Phillips' reception of her offer of assistance. More than once she almost made up her mind to return to London by the first train after breakfast. But always she found herself inclining towards staying. She wanted to go back because Phillips had hurt her. She wanted to stay because . . . well, just because. She left it at that.

The morning dawned bright and sunny, with a warm dry southeast wind whispering of spring and the coming summer. Behind the town the rolling baldness of the great hills spoke of freedom and air-like champagne, of roadless vistas of height and valley, of all that guarded wildness which is peculiar to the Downs.

The beauty of the morning gave Kitty an inspiration. She took a bus to Findon and began to climb the hills. From their summits she had a wonderful view. North, east and west, the Downs stretched, and the only sign of man was the single thread of the London road climbing towards the pass, the dotted red roofs of Salvington, and the village nestling below. Eastwards, for miles and miles, stretched

hill and vale, trackless, and gorse-dotted in places, but mainly bare and wind-swept. South, the embankments of Ciss's trenches stood rounded on the steep slope of Cissbury, and to Kitty's vivid imagination the armor of Caesar's legions might yet be shining in the sunlight as they stormed up to the ditch.

She felt that she walked the dark corridors of almost forgotten history with the black shapes of the long lost dead. It seemed impossible that less than sixty miles away was London.

A walk of half a mile across turf like the sprung floor of a dance hall brought Kitty to the southern edge of the height below which lay Red Roofs. She could see the house and its gardens plainly, the house austerely beautiful, mellow in the sunshine, the gardens meticulously ordered and kept, with their flagged paths, their pergolas, the spring flowers touching them here and there with color; and the wide peace of the park beyond.

Kitty shivered. The sunshine seemed suddenly obscured and there was a lowering shape all across the splendid house and its gardens, a shape indefinite in Kitty's vision, yet definite enough with threat.

She was about to turn away when she saw a man. He was lying on his stomach between two gorse bushes, and he held to his eyes a pair of field glasses, through which he was obviously watching Red Roofs. Kitty stood staring at him, feeling cold as if a chill wind had suddenly blown across the warm country. While she stared the man shifted, as though conscious of her scrutiny, looked quickly over his shoulder, and then got to his feet.

He dusted fragments of grass from his clothes and put the glasses into his jacket pocket, darting a swift glance at Kitty as he did so. Kitty remained still, watching him, with terror in her eyes and on her face.

"Lovely up here," he said. He had walked towards her, giving her an opportunity to be alarmed anew by his keen-lined, vulturine face, and his swift, dark eyes. "Perfectly lovely. And the view . . ." He produced his glasses once more. "You can pick out buildings in Brighton quite plainly and see the Isle of Wight." He was holding the glasses towards her.

Kitty did not reply. She took the glasses automatically and tried to avoid the glance of his eyes, tried not to notice the long white fingers, like dead claws and the pantherine grace of movement. She fumbled with the glasses at her eyes, her trembling fingers trying to focus them—and suddenly they fell to the grass. The man stooped swiftly and picked them up for her.

"I—I'm so sorry," Kitty began

stammering, her eyes in which waved banners of fear fixed anxiously on the man's face. A great voice was chanting within Kitty's head, and its echoes shook her soul. *This is Number One!*

The rolling skyline, the sun-kissed plain, the silver sea in the beautiful distance, seemed remote and unreal.

"It's quite all right." He was examining the glasses. "Nothing wrong—I assure you. No harm done at all!" He laughed.

To Kitty's ears the laugh held no mirth whatsoever. Here was the master killer come to his last slaying. Here was the man who had snapped his fingers for so long defiantly and contemptuously in the face of law and order, come to commit his last remorseless crime. In his strong hands lay the fate of the man who called himself Phillips—lay Kitty's happiness forever destroyed.

He said: "You perhaps live near the Downs?"

"No—in London. I—I'm staying at Worthing. I came out on the bus and thought I'd walk up here." Why couldn't she speak naturally? What justification had she for this utter lack of ease under his gaze?

He dropped the glasses into his pocket. "I like Worthing. I love all the country around here. I go every year to Goodwood to the races. It is the only race-meeting worth attending in the south of England." He looked about him and his smile came back. "I must get along. I've got a long walk before me."

Kitty turned away from him, trying to utter some commonplace as she did so, and becoming conscious of failure. Her only thought was to flee from the hilltop as from a place confined and accursed, to reach the village with its shops and little houses, its people and its main road traffic.

She stumbled down the steep slope, and, near the foot, looked back. The man with the glasses had vanished.

IV

As a matter of fact he was bolting down the western slope of the hill, running as hard as he could, and, so doing, quickly brought himself to a narrow lane above the village and a waiting car. Without stopping to draw breath he leapt into the car and drove to the junction of the lane and the main road, where he could see the lower stretch of the hill—and Kitty.

He watched Kitty cross the lower grassland, climb the stile and so come to the road, and he did not lower his glasses until she had boarded a bus bound for Worthing. His car followed the bus.

All through the ride home Kitty thought of the man on the hilltop. The greening hedgerows,

the spring sweetness across the fields and the hills, were lost to her in the darkness of her thoughts. Before her was still the stranger's face, wild with the wildness of an animal. She had met No. 1. She had met him in the sunshine on a hilltop in spring, and found only darkness and an agonized groping in the black byways of fear.

She wanted to go to Phillips and tell him. Yet why should she? Phillips had declared that at Red Roofs it was No. 1 or himself—that the long desperate fight would there be resolved. For Phillips to learn that No. 1 was close by would neither surprise nor disturb him.

The bus rumbled lazily into Worthing, dropping Kitty by the Town Hall. She walked on down South Street, sick with a dread foreboding of disaster. Her walk was aimless, but she turned automatically along the western parade towards the Burlingham Hotel, and at last entered it, her lips tight.

It was too early for lunch, and feeling incapable of staying alone in her room she went out to the little terrace which fronted on the marine parade.

As she sat down a little car drove past and Kitty had a quick, fleeting glimpse of the man who drove it. That glimpse sent all the color from her cheeks, and once and for all decided her immediate course of action. No. 1 had deliberately tracked her to the hotel.

Her emotions on the hilltop had betrayed her, had made him suspect her. With terrifying certainty she knew she had been brought inside the circle of danger which threatened Phillips.

Back in her room she dressed, not seeing her own reflection in the glass, but the face and eyes of the man she had met on the sunny hilltop. She did not pause to consider the necessity for seeing Phillips, but went straight downstairs to the hall porter and told him she wanted to hire a car with a driver which would be needed immediately.

The trip out to Red Roofs seemed interminable, but at last they turned in at the drive. The car sped smoothly up through the trees, reached the wide stretch of gravel directly before the house, and keeping to the further edge of the drive began to swing around in a big circle to pull up before the steps.

On this, there was a wild high cry which rose above the car's soft murmur, and the crunch of the tires on the gravel. Instinctively, the driver stepped on his brakes, and brought the car to a standstill, while Kitty, frantic with alarm, flung open the door and tumbled out.

"What was that?" she gasped.

"Someone screamed, Miss. Shall I go on to the house? By God, look!"

Kitty followed the direction of the driver's startled gaze. The French windows of the library had been flung open and a man had stumbled out on the lawn. His arms were flung wide, and he was whimpering with pain and shock. Down one side of his face, stretching from hair to chin, was a great knife wound. As Kitty stared in fear he stumbled to his knees, and began to crawl.

The driver sat rigid, clutching his steering wheel, his face as grim as death.

And then something broke in Kitty. Without thinking, she began to run—not towards the crawling man on the gravel, but towards the open window and the lighted room beyond it.

V

On that evening when Kitty McLeod drove up to Red Roofs, the man called Phillips was sitting in the library. It was not yet the customary time for dinner to be served, and Phillips was playing solitaire. Beside the cards on the table lay a short black pistol.

Although he was naturally conscious of acute tension, and had been careful to choose a seat which permitted him instant view of the window, he felt confident and largely serene. He had made his arrangements, and calculated everything to a nicety. True, an incalculable element in the scheme had been introduced by the alarming telephone message he had received the night before, but mature consideration had convinced him that he might safely go ahead on the lines of his original plan.

At any rate, nothing might be gained by dwelling on possibilities unlikely ever to materialize. Only one thing bothered him. The number which he had found attached to the window frame had been torn down during the night. Surely if No. 1 had hung that brass figure to the frame he would have left it there. And not snatch it from the screw only to throw it on the grass.

The question ran parallel with his contemplation of the card sequences as he shuffled and dealt and shuffled again. The incident, slight as it was, could not be lightly dismissed. In this matter where he gambled with death, the smallest chances must be considered. His mind returned to the telephone message. The smallest chances . . .

The window was open, and he was staring straight into the muzzle of a gun.

He sat rigid. What a fool he had been to relax his watchfulness for just a few seconds while he considered the problem of the brass figure!

The slightest of chances! He had just said that to himself—

the slightest! The telephone message and the brass figure had ruined his scheme—not because of their significance in themselves but because they had made him relax his vigilance for a sufficient length of time to enable the window to be quietly opened by the man before him.

No. 1 gently pushed the window closed, and, groping with his hand behind him, dragged the heavy curtains into place.

"At last!" he said. His voice had the same quality of softness which Kitty had observed on the hilltop. He stood quietly glaring at Phillips.

Phillips sat with the undealt cards still in his hand, realizing that he could die in this room in a fraction of a second. All of the arrangements he had made could prove abortive. Help might be close to him, but never close enough.

The features of No. 1 convulsed. "You dirty, murdering treacherous dog! Halverson, this is where you get yours!" He took a step forward, and another, until he was leaning against the other side of the table at which Phillips sat. His gun was rocklike in his grip, and Phillips remembered that No. 1 had the reputation of a man who never missed.

The silence grew ominous.

"Aren't you going to say anything?" cried No. 1. "Don't you want to go on your knees and beg for mercy? Don't you know that death's reaching out to touch you, Halverson?"

Phillips shook his head. "No."

No. 1 leaned forward, his thin lips sneering. "Tricked you nicely, didn't I? Dead in Madrid!" He laughed, the same laugh that Kitty had heard on the hilltop. "I found that damned coward dying like a rat in a hole. He was a no-man's man, and I decided to give him my identity. It worked, Halverson, it worked!"

"It didn't," said Phillips steadily. "The man who died in Madrid, and whose supposed confession was found, was named Albert Strange. He was an Englishman, aged thirty-seven, an engineer by profession, a wastrel by choice. He had come to Madrid from Algiers, via Algeciras."

No. 1 clicked his teeth together. "Do you mean—you knew?" he breathed.

Phillips nodded. "Exactly. I knew you were planning to trick me, and I decided to act first. You wanted your man to come out into the open. I decided that he might conveniently do so."

For just one moment there was a glint of uncertainty in the eyes of No. 1 "Then you've been waiting for me?"

"I have. In this very room, my friend."

No. 1 breathed deeply. He thrust his face across the table, ablaze with light. "Are you trying to trap me, Halverson?"

"The necessity for effort has

just passed," said Phillips. He was playing for time—why, he knew not, for his death seemed certain. His man would tap at the door before walking into the room to announce his dinner. And the moment the tap came Number 1 would fire.

"The necessity . . ." repeated No. 1 slowly. "What do you mean by that, Halverson?"

"Work it out and see," said Phillips quietly.

He watched No. 1 for a period of silence, and saw the man's face convulse once more.

"You mean I'm in the trap already?"

"Your perception is amazing," grinned Phillips.

He was reflecting that No. 1, too, was feeling the strain of the long chase. The hunter, it seemed, had nerves, as well as the hunted, and his alarm was making itself felt in no uncertain fashion. The word trap had a nasty sound. It suggested hidden watchers, stealthy observation, and eager fingers on rocking triggers.

"Anyhow," cried No. 1, "you will get yours, Halverson."

Phillips shrugged his shoulders. "Let's talk," he said. "I'm going to be frank with you. This *is* a trap. I laid it the moment I knew the man in Madrid was not you. I left a certain clue which I hoped you'd find. You evidently found it, and it led you here—which is where I wanted to lead you. That much, I hope, is plain to you."

No. 1 nodded. "Go on. You haven't much time left, but I'll listen to what you have to say."

Phillips did not answer at once. To betray impatience he knew would only increase the fret at his nerves, and make greater the shadow of impending danger. But when he realized that No. 1 was waiting grimly for him to proceed he did so with a businesslike seriousness.

"The break," he said, "looks even to me. You may get me where I sit, but you'll never live to remember it. I'm telling you that frankly. My plans are laid. You've slipped between them in that you've managed to confront me in this room, but you can't hope to slip out again. I'm putting the facts to you straight."

"Go on," said No. 1. "Say your piece. It's damned interesting."

"There's a question of money," said Phillips. "The money you consider yours, the money which belonged to The Seven."

No. 1 sneered. "I see. You're suggesting a split, eh? Now that you're cornered, you want to divide all square, and save your precious hide."

"Shall I tell you something, Halverson? It won't work. You can't keep the cash and let the credit go without sometimes wanting the credit. You want it now. You want it damned badly

—so badly that if you had it, it would save your life.

"But you haven't got it. You shot up my friends, you stole their money and mine. You played the rottenest trick I've ever known a man to play. And . . . you've still got yours coming to you for what you did that night."

Phillips kept his hands and his voice steady, kept his eyes unwavering on the face of the man opposite him.

"That's just melodrama," he said. "It sounds impressive, but it won't bear the least investigation. Is half the cash and one's life, better than just cold and sudden death?"

"I don't know!" cried No. 1. "I only know I've hunted you through . . ." The words halted. The tempest of rage within him agitated his voice and face.

"Halverson, I'm going to kill you. Take off that wig and those glasses."

The gun lifted. The curtains behind No. 1 parted, and a wild-eyed man came into the room. Phillips, starting to his feet, saw the sheen of steel as a knife slashed downwards, and heard No. 1 scream.

The knife came down and ripped across the gun hand of No. 1, so that the gun clattered to the floor. Somehow No. 1 managed to seize the knife, and twist it from the grip that held it. It was all done with a lightning swiftness, while Phillips groped for his own gun.

The knife stabbed at a dodging figure, seemed about to miss, and then—its edge sheered straight down the side of the newcomer's face.

The shriek of the man was hideous. He turned to the window and stumbled through it blindly, his shoulders heaving.

And as he went No. 1 waving an encrimsoned knife, cried out wildly: "By God! That was Halverson! *Who are you?*"

He turned to find himself looking into the gun which had lain on the table. The man called Phillips was taking off his wig and his glasses.

"My name," he said, "is Langley—Captain James Langley, of His Majesty's Secret Service, temporarily transferred some years ago for attachment to the C. I. D. to assist in hunting down The Seven. Your little Madrid trick did bring Halverson into the open. But I, too, was watching and I took him. I made up my mind to let the trick go on, and instead of imprisoning Halverson at once, I left him in charge of a man of mine, from whom, unfortunately, he escaped. I was telephoned that information only last night, together with the fact that my man feared Halverson's long, desperate flight from you had deranged his mind."

Langley glanced towards the

window. "Kitty! I thought I told you to go home!" As he said this, he pressed a bell-push on the desk before him.

No. 1 was gone, and so was Halverson. The Seven were definitely eliminated from the scheme of things, and while the old Daimler still stood out on the gravel, Kitty faced Langley in the library.

"It worked," he said. "No. 1 expected a disguised man. I gave him one—so disguised that he might have been anybody. He never suspected the trick till Halverson, bent on killing, lurched in at the window . . . Why—you're crying!"

"I—I know," she whispered.

She swayed towards him. "Jim—I thought you would be killed. I had it in my thoughts all the time, from the moment you decided to come down here. It just made my heart ache, as though it would break."

He stared at her, and sudden understanding flashed in his eyes.

"Kitty," he breathed.

He held out his arms to her.

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I came to kill

by . . . Irving E. Cox, Jr.

Setting out to murder someone you don't even know is a treacherous task. But love has a sure, firm way of bridging the darkest quicksands.

HE PUSHED THROUGH the stinging grass and manzanita until he reached a low dune beneath the walls. All afternoon he had lain hidden across the beach road, watching the house. Just at dusk he had seen three sedans stop briefly while the drivers picked up the deadly packages concealed inside the gate.

It was his moment of triumph.

The trail ended here. He was sure of it. It had taken him exactly two weeks to find it. He fingered the revolver weighing in the pocket of his slacks.

Shortly before ten o'clock that night the iron gates were shut and locked. Half an hour later all the lights in the mock-Spanish hacienda had gone out. Yet he waited still another thirty minutes before he slid any closer to the walls.

He stood on the dune, surveying the moonlit terrain. He could have smashed open the lock on the gate but he was afraid of setting off a warning alarm inside the house. The walls were

One of the rarest elements in modern crime fiction is the love of a man for a girl. We mean a "Farewell to Arms" kind of love, not just biological attraction alone. In the woman's-type mystery there is plenty of love of a girl for a man. It's the other way around that's a rarity. There are misogynists who claim such tender emotion has no place in a story of violence. But love can be a highly effective catalyst in competent hands—as Irving Cox convincingly proves in his newest suspenseful yarn.

high. Without a ladder or rope, he could not scale them.

The estate lay on the north shore of Borrasca Bay. Far in the distance he saw the lights of Punta de Borrasca, dominated by the slow-turning disc of the Ferris Wheel. Their reflection flickered over the water like strands of a golden spider web. Directly across the bay, opposite the hacienda, lay the silhouette of Borrasca Point, beyond it the churning breakers of the inlet. Hundreds of anchored yachts were silver shadows on the water. Its lapping echoed the occasional splutter of a motor or the clanging of a channel buoy.

At the rear of the walled hacienda, on the bay shore, were a narrow white beach, a blue-tiled pool and a landing dock. Rowboats, rubber rafts and canoes were clustered on one side of the wharf. On the other two motor launches rocked languidly in a low-roofed shelter large enough for three. The walls of the estate extended to the shore of the bay, where they joined thick jetties that angled a hundred feet or more into the water.

It would be no problem to swim around a jetty and enter the estate from the beach. He stripped off his slacks, his flame-colored sport shirt and his straw sandals, bound them into a bundle around his revolver to keep it dry. With his belt he fastened the bundle atop his head. It was all the clothing he had worn, every piece of it purchased that morning in Punta de Borrasca. If anything happened to him none of it could be identified or traced beyond the town itself.

For the same reason the suitcase at his motel was empty. He had bought his twenty-year-old coupé at Mel Ellings, paying cash for it. The car might be checked as far as the second-hand dealer in Santa Monica, no farther—for Mel Ellings had died a year ago in Korea.

He waded silently into the water, which was cold and stinking with harbor slime. When it was deep enough for him to swim he used a slow breast-stroke that made no ripple on the surface.

He had only a vague idea of what he meant to do. Simple murder was a possibility—but it was too fast. Payment should be in kind. He might try to rig a situation that would betray the setup to the police but he knew he was not that clever. And, he asked himself, was legal justice enough?

He did not deceive himself that he had found the hacienda because of any superior intelligence. It was simply that he was driven by the consuming white fury of hatred. The trail had led him through the slums of Los Angeles and the glitter of Hollywood, into the perverted minds

of human debris. The police could have done as much and far more quickly but their hands were tied by the processes of the law they served.

He pulled himself up on the sand, creeping into the shadow of the dock, where he wiped his body relatively dry on his sport shirt. When he drew on his slacks the cloth clung damply to his legs. Wadding the wet shirt into an untidy ball he crushed it into a pocket of his trousers. It could have become a bit of telltale evidence had he left it on the beach.

He looked up at the house, idly tracing the handle of his revolver with an index finger. He was a heavily built six feet, broad shouldered and slim. A narrow white scar slanted across his chest, a second marred the curve of his naked shoulder. His face was serious, its gravity emphasized by the hollows under his eyes. His short-cropped black hair fitted his scalp like a skullcap.

He moved silently toward the house. In Punta de Borrasca that morning he had learned that the hacienda belonged to Harry Copping, who had lived in the resort for more than ten years. Copping had a family—two sons and a daughter. There was some talk of a motorboat accident in which one of Copping's guests had been killed six or eight months before. Other than that Harry Copping appeared to be no more than a highly respectable resident of the resort.

Sparse enough, yet it was more than he had known before. Even Jake, quivering on the fringe of madness, hadn't told him as much.

"Honest, Mr. Ellings!" Jake had said. "I don't know who lives there. I jus' pick up the stuff, that's all. Two years ago Marv tried to find out. Now Marv's dead. They found him in an alley in San Pedro—two slugs in his head. We ain't been curious since that."

The man who called himself Ellings edged through a windbreak of shrubs that bordered the flagstone dining terrace. With a shock of fear he jerked back, standing breathless in the deep shadows. A woman stood by the open French doors—small, fragile, intensely white in a long silk robe. For a moment he hoped she hadn't seen him. But hope died when she glided toward him, a finger on her lips.

"Who are you?" she whispered. "What do you want?" There was no fright in her voice, rather a silky tone of wonder.

He had planned for every contingency except this. He stammered, "I'm Mel Ellings. I think I—"

"*Please!* Not so loud—they might hear us." She beckoned with a hand so small, so white in the moonlight, that it might

have been lace. She led him across the terrace to a glass-walled deck beyond the house. By that time he was able to put together what seemed to be a plausible explanation.

"I'm sorry I disturbed you, Miss—ah . . ."

"Copping—Fleur Copping."

"We were swimming from a cruiser in the bay. I lost the ship somehow and I thought I'd better swim ashore."

"How fortunate you brought dry slacks, Mr.—Ellings." She was facing him, the top of her head no higher than his chin. She turned and looked up into his face, smiling while the moonlight translated the filmy web of her hair into a silver halo. The smile faded. Very gently she touched the scar tissue on his shoulder.

"But you were hurt!"

"A long time ago—it's nothing."

"Have you been . . . ?"

"No!"

He moved away from her but she took his hand and looked into his face again. "I'm afraid I was watching from my bedroom window, Mr. Ellings. I saw you swim under the wharf with that queer bundle of clothing on your head. Did you come here to rob us?"

She gave him no time to reply, putting a hand over his lips as she added, "Father has lots of nice things. There's sterling in the dining room and a Picasso. And upstairs, of course, mother's jewelry and mine. If that's what you're after, I'll show you where it is. You can go your way in peace. It's all insured."

"Do you take me for a fool?"

"I take you for no less than you are—and no more."

Slowly the fear that had tied his muscles in knots began to fade. He seemed to see her clearly for the first time. She was very young—no more than twenty—a pale young goddess carved in ivory. He had come to do murder and this unexpected and frail human barrier stood in his way!

"Robbery is just one possibility, Mr. Ellings."

"But you want to be able to tell your friends how you caught the naughty man red-handed all by yourself."

"Perhaps I do. But I'd rather have them meet the man himself." Her candor was oddly evasive. She seemed to have an objective in mind but she moved toward it obliquely.

"There's a second alternative, Mr. Ellings. Across the bay, on Borrasca Point, there's a rest home leased as a veteran's hospital. Let's suppose one of the men felt very restless. He's nearly well—it's almost time for his discharge. But he doesn't want to wait. He might swim across the bay one night, bringing his clothes strapped to his head."

She looked up. "Which is it, Mr. Ellings?"

"If I came here to steal *you're* inviting me to lie. How will you ever know the truth?"

"We make our lies real, just as we do the truth. There isn't much difference between them. But this time *I'll* know because I want you to come back."

"When?"

"Tomorrow—in the afternoon."

He hesitated. "Even if I come, Miss Copping, you won't know the truth. I could be playing a game of my own, stringing you along."

"But we would both be pretending then. Isn't that the same thing? Two and two don't really make four—people just pretend they do. When you're little and you play you're a princess in the tower, about to be rescued by a knight on a white horse, you really *are* a princess—even if the tower is just your old high chair and the knight the little boy from down the street."

She locked her arm in his and walked with him to the front gate. As the heavy, iron grille swung back on its creaking hinges she held his hand tightly and whispered, "Come back, please, Mr.—*no!*—Lieutenant Ellings!" Her voice throbbed suddenly with a torrent of emotion. "Yes, Lieutenant! It *has* to be that!"

"Ellings actually was—that is . . ."

She pulled his face down to hers, kissing him on the lips. Her cheeks were wet with tears. For a moment she clung to him. Then she turned and ran back into the silent house.

He walked briskly along the beach road toward the glittering lights of Punta de Borrasca. Her tempestuous volatility was baffling—but he thought he understood it. She was a romantic little girl, playing out a fairy tale with a man she believed to be a thief. At the last minute she had been frightened by her own audacity. Of course, she didn't expect him to return.

However, nothing suited his purpose better. By accident she had interfered. Yet he could turn this accident to advantage. She had given him a perfectly natural reason for introducing himself into the Copping household. With any luck, perhaps with a little shrewdness, he could come to know them well enough to discover exactly which of them he was after—the sons, the father, possibly Fleur Copping herself.

But did it matter? It had made no difference to them whether Butch was a boy of seventeen or a mature man of seventy. The ancient folk-gospel of Hammurabi re-entered his thoughts. An eye for an eye. The Coppings—one or all of them—had killed Butch. What had held him back tonight when he stood in the

silent garden, face to face with Copping's daughter, as young, as helplessly innocent as Butch had been? It could have been—*would* have been revenge in kind, payment in full. Yet he knew he could not have gone through with it. He could stamp out the evil itself, ruthlessly, even with pleasure—but all other vengeance was pointless.

A damp mist was rolling in across the bay, clouding the sky, dissipating the sharpness of the moon. Shivering in the wind, he shook out his soggy sport shirt and put it on. It merely increased his discomfort. When he reached his motel room he dropped exhausted on the bed, fumbled in the bureau for the bottle of whiskey he had bought that morning. He half-filled a water tumbler and gulped it quickly.

As the fire burned through his body, his shivering ceased. He threw off his clothes and fell naked on the bed, pulling up the blanket to shut out the phantoms crowding in on his mind from out of the lonely darkness. But driving nightmare came at last, as it always did . . .

II

Sergeant Sessions came home from Korea by way of a two month's detour in a military hospital. On the day he was discharged his whole family met him at the train—Mom, Dad and Butch. They drove home to their new house in one of the mushrooming suburbs of Los Angeles. The sergeant saw Butch alone only once after that, for perhaps ten minutes, before Mom called them to dinner.

"I'm glad you're home—damn glad, Stan," Butch said. The sergeant noted the mild profanity, dragged in deliberately like a battle flag. He supposed it was part of growing up—he had to remember that Butch was suddenly seventeen.

"How's school, Butch? Still keeping up with your grades?"

Butch stood with his back to the windows, slowly twisting his hands together. "I been wondering, Stan. When you get shot up, does it—did it hurt much?"

"More afterwards, I think. At the time . . ."

"I couldn't take it—you know that, Stan?" The boy laughed nervously.

"When it happens, Butch, you're all keyed up. You've got a job to do and you do it. We had a machine-gun nest up on the side of the hill to clear out. After it was over I noticed the blood on my shoulder and I was surprised because I couldn't make my arm move. The next thing I remember I was in a plane on my way to Japan."

"They going to let you out?"

"I don't know. The Doc'll decide that later on." The Sergeant tapped a cigarette out of a bat-

tered package and lit it. Then, after a momentary hesitation, he offered the pack to his brother.

Butch shook his head. "I can't. Mom doesn't like it." He gave his nervous laugh again and began to pace back and forth.

Sessions studied his brother curiously. He had an unhappy feeling that their old intimacy was ended. In two years Butch had become a stranger. The extroverted awkward adolescent of fifteen was gone. None of that Butch's personality seemed to have survived. Butch was at least a foot taller than he had been, so thin he seemed emaciated. His manner was shy, secretive, nervous.

Growing pains, Sessions supposed. But then he remembered how Butch's palm had been damp with sweat when they shook hands at the station. Vaguely Sessions knew this should have suggested something but he couldn't place the association.

"Stan, if you're not out yet, how'll you—what I mean is—do they give you any dough?"

"Enough."

"I thought maybe you'd be getting a job or something."

"I might."

Butch wrung his hands again. With a kind of agony he asked, "Got any on you? Dough, I mean."

Sessions smiled. He thought he understood. "So you want a couple of bucks to take your girl to the show. Let's see what we can do." He fished a five out of his wallet and handed it to his brother. "Buy her a hamburger afterward, on me."

Butch crumpled the bill and jammed it into his pocket but there was no gratitude in his expression. "It's—you see, Stan, it's not just a show. Really a big deal. And I kind of wondered . . ."

"If a five-spot isn't enough, maybe you're running a little out of your class."

"Prices are so high, that's all!" Butch's voice was suddenly shrill and he seemed frightened. "Thanks a lot, Stan—a hell of a lot."

Mom called them to dinner then. Butch ate almost nothing and before the meal was over two boys came for him, honking the raucous horn of a hot-rod furiously in front of the house.

"Oh, Butch, not again tonight!" Mom said. "This is Stan's first night home. I should think you'd want—"

"I'm awful sorry, Mom—honest." Butch kissed her on the forehead. "I've had this deal cooking for weeks. I can't stand up the gang. Stan understands."

When Butch was gone Mom and Dad began to complain about the high-school crowd Butch ran around with. It was the old story. The young people were always out of hand. Their parents could not understand them or keep

them under control. Sessions smiled a little. They had talked the same way about him before he went into the army. Butch would grow up in another year or so.

But this time the familiar story had a slightly different ending.

Mom awoke Sessions at four the next morning. She seemed numbed with grief and shock. Three boys, she said, had held up a gas station in Glendale. They had tried to get away in a hopped-up jalopy and it had overturned on the canyon freeway. Two of the boys were dead. One of them was Butch.

Sessions found the needle and the package of powder on the day of Butch's funeral. Mom had asked him to straighten up Butch's room and, buried at the back of the closet, Sessions saw the trick box he had sent his brother from Japan. For something to do that would postpone thought he twisted the mechanism that released the hidden drawer. Butch had kept the drug concealed there.

Sessions understood then. He understood why Butch's hand had been slick with sweat, why he had wanted money so desperately. Having failed to get enough from his brother the hold-up was his only alternative.

Sessions could have given the evidence to the police. In time they would have tracked down the peddler of the narcotic and ultimately the bench would have handed down its ridiculously inappropriate sentence. But Butch was dead and other kids everywhere were endangered by the same slow-poisoning evil. For this crime the punishment must balance the scale. Sessions made his decision then.

One boy had survived the accident. Sessions talked to him in the hospital. Verbal persuasion was enough to get from him the name of the peddler who had sold the drug to Butch.

Sessions was constrained by none of the legal processes. He simply jerked the peddler into his car, drove to the hills and methodically beat the information out of him. Fortunately the man survived and Sessions was considerate enough to leave him on the doorstep of a Glendale hospital.

He inched his way through the maze of the chain-of-supply with plodding efficiency. His links were addicts themselves and that simplified the job. He was entirely aware that he was dealing with a well-organized conspiracy and he expected retaliation. But he moved too fast. The underlings knew only their immediate superiors and in consequence the information of his one-man crusade moved up the hierarchy toward the top more slowly than Sessions himself.

Jake was the final link. Sessions dragged him out of a gaudy

club in Hollywood and began what developed into a twelve-hour marathon persuasion. In the end Jake talked because he had been deprived of the drug too long. He explained that he was one of seven drivers who picked up the packaged drug at a hacienda on the beach road north of Punta de Borrasca. They left the payoff money in the same place. He had no idea who put the drug there, no desire to find out.

Sessions would have taken Jake to a hospital as he had the others, but Jake's crack-up was swift and violent. While he talked, he wept in an agony of bodily pain. Afterward, trembling uncontrollably, he begged Sessions for a shot. And he was terrified when he found no shot was to be the reward for his information.

With the glazed blindness of lunacy filming his eyes he turned and fled. The dialogue of persuasion had been staged on a deserted dirt road, high in the San Bernardino Mountains. Sessions ran after Jake, trying to save him. In his blind fear Jake failed to see the edge of a ravine. His feet slipped on loose gravel and his screams echoed briefly over the lonely hills.

When, an hour later, Sessions had worked his way to the bottom of the ravine Jake was dead. But Sessions had the information about the hacienda in Punta de Borrasca. As Mel Ellings, a lieutenant he knew had died in Korea, he bought a second-hand car and drove to the yachting resort, several miles north of Santa Monica on the California coast.

Jake had died in the hills but his dying went on, over and over, in the sergeant's nightmare—a nightmare that began and ended with violence. Somehow Jake and Butch had become fused. The terror of one addict's scream became the agony of his brother's death torment in a blazing wreck on the canyon freeway.

In the morning Sessions walked to the shopping district of Punta de Borrasca. He was tired and hollow-eyed. The bright sun lacked luster. The flaming colors of the resort, the calculated artistry of landscaped palms, seemed faded and ugly.

He bought new clothes in a men's store and mailed a perfunctory card to his parents, maintaining the illusion that he was vacationing at the resort. He spent the rest of the morning in the library, reading through the files of the *Borrasca Eagle,* looking for references to Copping.

At scattered intervals, Harry Copping had participated in various local festivities. As director of the Fiesta de Borrasca seven years ago, twice as president of the yachting club, as perennial member of the board of judges for the Borrasca Bay Races. All

of these civic activities had abruptly ceased two years before.

The boating accident which had taken place six months earlier was reported but Sessions nearly missed it because Copping was mentioned only once, in a paragraph noting that the victim had been Copping's guest. The account of the accident was sketchy. Two young men, both from the Copping hacienda, had been racing to the inlet when one of the launches exploded. The driver of the second made valiant efforts at a rescue but in vain. The body was not recovered until the following morning. An autopsy made it clear the victim had died instantly in the explosion.

III

Shortly after one o'clock Sessions drove back to the hacienda. A maid admitted him to a red-tiled hall and a moment later a tall dignified white-haired woman came toward him, extending her hand.

"I'm so glad—so very glad, Lieutenant!" Her voice was overwhelmingly warm, laden with emotion out of all proportion to the situation. "Fleur told us you'd be coming, Lieutenant Ellings. I'm Fleur's mother. Mr. Copping is anxious to meet you too."

Still talking—gushing would have described her flow of words, save that gushing implied a shallowness this woman lacked—she led him into a long glass-walled room that ran the length of the house. A stout balding man sat by the window in a leather chair, a portable desk open on his lap. Behind him a younger man worked at a littered desk.

"Harry," said Mrs. Copping, "this is Lieutenant Ellings."

The bald man looked up, with a startled expression. Then he smiled—an invitingly open smile like his daughter's — and held out his hand. "So there actually is—Lieutenant, you've no idea how glad we are. Sit down, sir. Tell us all about yourself!"

"Harry rushes things so," his wife said. "Can I get you something to drink, Lieutenant?"

"Scotch, please."

While she rang for the maid her husband snapped his portable desk shut, so quickly that some of the papers spilled on the floor. He squirmed in his chair, grimacing as he tried to retrieve them with the rubber-tipped point of a cane. The young man at the desk behind him got up quickly and scooped the papers together. He performed the act with ease.

"These damn' legs of mine," Copping muttered. He smiled wryly at Sessions. "You may as well know the worst, right at the start. I've had arthritis for the last couple of years. Nothing seems to do me any good. Sometimes it gets so I can't move out of my chair. If it weren't for Jack—pardon me, Lieutenant!

This is Jack Grange, my secretary."

The young man held out his hands. He was entirely undistinguished. Small rimless glasses gave him a slightly studious expression, but beyond that he seemed as utterly devoid of feeling as a typewriter or an adding machine. When Sessions knew him better he often thought of Jack Grange as a strange combination of both.

"Shall I finish for you, Mr. Copping?" Grange asked.

"Please! You know what I want." He patted the secretary's pale hand affectionately. "Jack's been with me since he graduated from the School of Finance five years ago, Lieutenant. I don't know what I'd have done without him. In the last two years . . ."

"I think I can clear up the refinery papers before two, Mr. Copping," Grange broke in, with obvious modesty. "Would you like a spin around the bay when I'm through?"

"If you're willing to put up with me, my boy."

The secretary piled together the papers from the desk and slid quietly out of the room. Fleur Copping came in as he left, an elf in a white bathing suit with a terry-cloth robe flung loosely around her shoulders.

For awhile they sat in the living room and talked, sipping their highballs. It was trivial conversation, pleasantly pointless —and it left Sessions baffled. The Coppings seemed thoroughly nice people, as obviously so as his own parents. It was impossible to associate either of them with traffic in drugs.

Point by point the argument was driven home. Copping was a successful businessman, owning a string of oil refineries and a small distributing company. His legitimate income far exceeded anything he could have made illicitly and it always had. That seemed to dispose of the only conceivable motive. In addition Harry Copping was an invalid and relatively helpless. It was equally inconceivable that he left his chair at intervals and darted out to the gate to leave his deadly packages concealed in the shrubs.

But if Sessions disposed of the elder Coppings, what of Fleur? True, she was enigmatic, somewhat devious and indirect. Yet he could not believe this enigmatic front was a mask for crime. That left only the possibility of the two Copping sons. When he saw them that notion evaporated too. One was a child of twelve, the other ten.

Sessions faced a paradox. The trail led to this house—he had seen the sedans pick up the packages at the gate. Yet none of the Coppings could be responsible. To increase the contradiction, he was equally sure he

knew how the drug was brought into the hacienda for packaging.

Two ocean-going cruisers lay at the wharf. The inlet and the open sea were only two miles across the bay. Any sort of wholesale smuggling could easily have been engineered. A pleasure yacht could put to sea from Borrasca Bay and return at any hour without arousing suspicion. Large shipments of the drug could be brought to a prearranged point offshore by ships from the Orient or South America. Contact with a launch from the hacienda would be fast, accurate, relatively safe. So . . .

Later in the afternoon Jack Grange wheeled Mr. Copping down to the pier and lifted him into one of the cruisers. As the little boat shot cleanly into the sparkling water of the bay Mrs. Copping said, "I suppose it's time for our swim, now."

The two boys, who had been nagging for precisely that, went whooping up the stairs to put on their suits. Their mother smiled indulgently at Sessions. "It's so hard to make them wait, Lieutenant, but there ought to be at least an hour after they've eaten, don't you think? I'll see if I can find you a suit."

He was left pointedly alone with Fleur in the pool. Mrs. Copping restrained the two boys to the shallow water. She was playing the role of a designing mother—but why? What made her so eager to throw her daughter at him after such short acquaintance? Fleur represented the catch, not he. By the standards he understood both parents should have thrown up frigid walls to protect Fleur from him.

Instead they welcomed him for the man he pretended to be. His stomach curled with self-revulsion as he churned furiously through the warm salt water. His masquerade as Ellings was a lie and the deception seemed to taint him with the very sort of evil he wanted to root out.

For the first time he realized that the price of vengeance came high—not only for himself but for others accidentally involved.

Fleur took him down to the strip of beach and he lay on the sand, feeling the salt water dry crisply on his skin. Fleur sat beside him, humming softly while she rubbed sun-oil into her arms.

"You know, this is the first time I've been out this summer." she said.

"And you have a pool of your own? I'd have thought . . ."

"I wasn't interested until you came last night, Dave." She bit her lip. "How silly of me! Your name's Mel, of course. Really, Lieutenant, I have a better memory than that." She poured oil into her hand and timidly began to rub it into his chest. "You don't mind, Lieutenant? I—I have such a queer feeling I've done all this before."

After a pause he said, "You see, Miss Copping, I did come back."

"But you've always—oh, yes." She frowned for a moment. "That makes it all true, doesn't it?"

"No."

"But you're pretending and I said—"

"You can't pretend away reality."

"You *can!*" Her tiny hand was clenching and unclenching on his chest, kneading his skin. "We couldn't live if we didn't, don't you see? There's nothing else." Her hand slid across his chest until she was leaning over him, her face above his. "Will you call me Fleur?"

"If you like."

"And let me call you . . ." She hesitated. "It's Mel, isn't it? We can pretend about that too at first, if you'd rather. But it'll come true after awhile, just the way this did."

Her head moved closer and her lips met his. There was no pretense in her kiss. She talked the child and looked the child but in her lips was the flame of maturity. Gradually she relaxed in his arms, cuddling close to his chest and looking up at the wisps of white in the sky.

"Fleur," he said hoarsely, "Fleur, come down out of the clouds. You're trying to make yourself believe nonsense your mind won't accept."

"But it works—sometimes. You see, there's no sorrow in my world, Dave." Once again she caught herself. "I'm sorry, Mel. You'd think I could remember . . ."

"Dave—who is he, Fleur?"

She stood up, twisting her hands together, looking out over the bay. When he was beside her she reached for his hand. There was a strange intensity in her eyes, a staring lack of focus. "We really ought to go in and dress or we'll be late for dinner." She turned toward the house.

Sessions spent the evening at the hacienda, at least until the polite and proper hour of ten. After the two boys were in bed Fleur played the piano and sang for him, while her father and Jack Grange played cribbage in front of the fire and Mrs. Copping sat nodding over a novel—which, it was clear, she was not reading.

Fleur said good night at the door but as Sessions drove his second-hand coupé through the gate he saw Mrs. Copping waiting in the moonlight on the beach road. He stopped.

"It was wonderful today, Lieutenant," she said. "Better than it's been for months. You were a Godsend!"

"Because of something I've done?"

"Will you come again tomorrow?"

"I'd hoped that I could." He

writhed at the hyprocrisy of the conventional courtesy. Deliberately to involve these people increased his feeling that he was falling himself into the filth he had followed from his brother's grave to the Copping hacienda.

"Come early, Lieutenant. And thank you for everything."

He spent the greater part of the next three days at the hacienda and learned nothing. He stayed as close to the gate as he could, but he saw no further deliveries made. He expected that, for it was improbable wholesale lots of the drug would be distributed more than once or twice a month.

He made guarded inquiries about the servants, since they were the only remaining possibilities if he eliminated the Coppings. But again he seemed to draw a blank. The drug had been distributed from the hacienda for at least five years and none of the servants had been there that long. Most of them came and went with the seasons.

IV

On the third afternoon, while Sessions was in the pool, Jack Grange quietly came out and asked him into the living-room, where Mr. Copping was waiting to talk to him. The secretary went back to his work at a desk behind his employer. For several seconds Copping fidgeted with his portable desk, avoiding Sessions' eye.

Sessions lit a cigarette, quietly watching his host. Copping must have found out who he was—or, more exactly, who he was not. There would now be a quiet little scene, all in impeccable taste—and the faithful Mr. Grange would be asked to throw the impostor out of the house. With studied indifference Sessions took a newspaper from the table and glanced at it. The sheet was printed in Spanish, published in Mexico.

"You read Spanish?" Copping asked suddenly. Obviously he had not asked Sessions there to discuss linguistics but he seemed to welcome the diversion.

"I had a year in high school. I've forgotten most of it."

"So have I."

Sessions glanced at the stamped address. "But you subscribe to this!"

Copping laughed. "No, I don't do that either. The paper just comes, year after year. Once I wrote a letter to the editor and suggested that he was wasting time and money on me. But I didn't even get an answer. It's some sort of an advertising scheme, I imagine." Copping paused, coughed, and then went on, "Lieutenant, my wife tells me you're living in a motel up on the highway."

"Yes, Rainbow Cabins."

"Kind of bleak, isn't it, when you're alone?"

"I don't mind," Sessions said.

"But it's foolish. We have—that is, my wife and I . . ." He coughed again. "We'd like to have you move here, to the hacienda, for the rest of your vacation."

Sessions might not have accepted the invitation if he had not seen the Mexican newspaper. At long last he had found another possible piece of evidence. When a shipment of drugs was made a coded advertisement of the time of arrival would be inserted in the newspaper, which daily reached the Copping hacienda. Someone in the house would know exactly when to meet the foreign ship.

The Spanish newspaper was addressed to Harry Copping. It suddenly occurred to Sessions that arthritis was not a visible invalidism. He had only Copping's word that he was incapacitated by the disease—and his host had gone out of his way to point that out almost as soon as they had met.

Sessions allowed himself to be persuaded to move to the hacienda the next morning. When he drove back to the motel that night a dismal fog was rolling in from the bay but he was humming cheerfully. The Spanish newspaper was the first solid fact he had stumbled on since meeting the Coppings. It meant, once again, that he was right. The trail ended here.

Sessions took the botlte of whiskey out of the drawer of his bureau and reached for the tumbler. It was not on the nightstand, where he had left it. In cleaning the room that morning the maid had been more scrupulous than usual. He went into the bathroom for the glass, filling it with a finger of liquor. As he carried it back to the bedroom, watching the reflection of light in the golden liquid, his toe caught on the turned edge of the rug and he stumbled.

He dropped the glass and it shattered. At the same time the mirror over the bureau cracked and broke. Sessions reacted with battle instinct, diving for the relative safety at the foot of his bed and grabbing for his revolver. To his astonishment he noticed a bullet on the floor. Then suddenly a second bullet smashed the wood four inches above his head, ricocheting from the cement wall.

He fired blindly through the broken window. He heard excited voices in the cabin next to his. Yellow exterior lights blazed on, glaring like great fuzzy eyes in the swirling fog. Footsteps crushed on the stones of the drive and Sessions heard the sound of a motor. He ran for his coupé, rocking it out to the highway so fast that the turning wheels cut an angry crescent in the motel lawn. But his assailant was gone.

He looked back and saw a

small crowd gathered around the open door of his cabin. It seemed both unwise and unsafe to return. Even if his assailant did not come back he would have awkward questions from the police to answer. He spun the coupé south on the highway until he found another motel with a *vacancy* sign beckoning warmly through the mist. He registered under his own name and slept out the night in comfort.

He moved to the hacienda early the next morning. The elder Coppings were embarrassingly profuse with their welcome —and Fleur was delighted. All day she clung close to him, holding his hand as if she were afraid she might lose him. He felt an acute discomfort, as if the act of changing his place of residence had committed him irretrievably to a course whose ending could only be tragic.

He knew then that he loved Fleur.

And when he admitted that to himself he faced the logical corollary. He had come to avenge his brother's death. It could be Fleur he was seeking—more probably it was her father. To the twisted skein of his nightmare this new twist was added.

Sessions had been given a room overlooking the dining terrace. It was next to Fleur's and when he looked through the windows that night he understood why she had seen him so clearly when he swam beneath the dock. The beach, the pool, the curve of the bay lay beneath the windows, sharply etched in the moonlight.

If any of Copping's launches was used to contact a ship offshore it would be done at night. Sessions then had merely to watch from his bedroom until he saw one of the boats taken out. It was absurdly easy—too easy. Copping had invited him here and given him this room. Either Copping was entirely sure of himself—or entirely innocent.

Since Sessions had seen the drugs picked up at the gate less than a week earlier he knew it was much too soon to expect a new shipment. Nonetheless he dragged a chair up to the window and sat dozing in it. There was only a small chance he would see anything that night—but it was not a chance to be overlooked.

To his surprise the dining-room door immediately below his window creaked open shortly before midnight. The mist was rolling in from the sea but on the dining terrace he saw, quite clearly, a muffled figure, stooped awkwardly over a cane as he hobbled toward the wharf.

So it was Copping!

Sessions' immediate instinct was to follow but he checked himself. Copping had a right to go where he pleased on his own estate at whatever bizarre hour he chose. As Copping pushed one of the cruisers out of the

shelter Sessions began to consider something else. The situation was too pat, the result of too many coincidences. Copping meant to have him follow. He had been put in this particular room so he would see the cruiser taken out. The creaky door below his window had been used to make sure he would be awake.

He listened carefully but heard no sound of a motor. He began to understood then the trap Copping had laid. Last night two shots had missed—because he had happened to stumble as the first was fired. This error was about to be rectified. The launch would be lying silent just off the beach. Copping would be bent over the wheel with a gun in his hand. Sessions would make a cleaner target against the white background of the beach. And in the morning the lieutenant would be found inexplicably—if conveniently—dead on the sand, perhaps with the added touch of a revolver in his hand.

Since he knew it was a trap he decided to use it himself. If he could be seen on the beach just long enough to be a tempting target but not a sure one, Copping would fire. Sessions had taken far greater chances in battle. He knew the danger here—he thought he would have time to take cover. If Copping could be forced into an aggressive move he would have to drop his role of innocent invalid. He might be psychologically panicked. In any case Sessions' way would be clear to carry out the plan he had had when he came to Punta de Borrasca.

He stripped down to his bathing trunks. They were more convenient for the kind of fighting he might have to engage in. Carrying his gun he slipped out the front door of the house, avoiding his bedroom balcony. Beneath it he would be sharply silhouetted against the wall of the house. In the shadow of the wall bordering the property, he began to edge his way toward the beach. It was slow going through a wild tangle of shrubs and vines. He was sliding down toward the sand when he saw the muffled figure hobbling back to the hacienda.

It didn't make sense! If Copping intended to kill him he had scarcely waited in the launch long enough for Sessions to get out of the house. But what else had Copping been doing? Obviously he had not had time to contact any ship lying beyond the inlet.

Sessions began to walk back to the hacienda, no longer taking the precaution of keeping under cover. As he crossed a strip of sand he heard a window flung open and Fleur's frantic scream. Four words were intelligible, "*Dave!* Don't *leave* me!"

And the screaming began.

Sessions swung up the outside balcony to his room. He pulled

on a robe and went into the hall. The overhead light was on. The family and servants were crowding outside Fleur's door. Mrs. Copping pushed it open. Almost at once Fleur's hysteria became a subdued weeping as her mother talked in low anxious tones.

He noted something else. Mr. Copping stood in the hall, leaning heavily on his cane, his knotted fingers clenched on his secretary's arm. Jack Grange, self-possessed as ever, had taken time to put on his glasses, had even made some effort to smooth down his hair. His eyes were as alert, as efficient, as blank as the keys of an electric calculator.

The important thing was Grange had met Copping outside Fleur's door. Copping had walked the length of the hall alone. In the stress of crisis he had walked unaided. And, it seemed to Sessions, the grimace of pain had flushed up into Copping's face only after he saw Sessions and was reminded of the role he was playing.

Sessions was sure he had the answer then. For almost a week it had been in front of him and he had overlooked it, confused by the Copping hospitality.

Mrs. Copping came to Fleur's door, pushing a wisp of gray hair back out of her eyes. "Fleur says she saw a man on the beach. She understands now that she was mistaken. She'll be all right in the morning."

V

Sluggishly the small crowd began to disperse. As two maids brushed past Sessions he heard a scornful whisper. "Mistake, she says! I seen it myself. It was Mr. Copping an' that's the Gospel!"

Mrs. Copping's hand fell lightly on Sessions' arm. "Lieutenant, I'm going down and make myself a glass of warm milk. Will you join me?"

"Mrs. Copping, I don't—"

"Please! I want to talk to you."

The milk was a transparent excuse. She went through the motions of filling a saucepan and setting it on the stove but when she had poured a cup for herself and another for him she stirred the liquid absently without touching it. They sat in the kitchen, walled with yellow tile and gleaming appliances.

"Lieutenant," she said in a tired voice, "we haven't been fair with you. We asked you here for reasons of our own, because—"

"People usually do, Mrs. Copping."

"—because of Fleur," she continued with quiet determination. "Even on the first day there was such a change when you were here. Do you know, she hadn't gone in the pool, she hadn't tried to sing—not for months! You've done her more good than any of the psychiatrists."

"Psychiatrists?"

"Now you know. If you want to leave in the morning we'll understand." She turned away, her lips trembling. "But don't—*please!* This is the first hope we've had. Tonight she knew, as soon as I started talking to her. She admitted herself it wasn't David she had seen out there. For the first time, Lieutenant! You've done that much for her."

"Who is David? Fleur mentioned his name but—"

"David Hunter. A young man very much like yourself, Lieutenant. You could be mistaken for each other. David was a Naval lieutenant. Fleur had known him for years. He was spending a leave here with us and they were going to be married sometime this summer." She took a breath wearily. "David was killed in a motorboat accident last spring."

"The explosion?"

"I thought you might have read about it. Fleur saw it from the beach. We've never known exactly what happened. It was dusk—they'd been drinking. I suppose it was one of those foolish races to the inlet—that's what we told the newspapers anyway. Young people are always inventing such dangerous nonsense."

Her eyes darkened in sorrow.

"Fleur went into hysteria when she tried to tell us and it's been progressively worse since. The psychiatrists tell us it's a combination of melancholia and a guilt complex. Fleur was obviously—well, young people do that sort of thing these days.

"It doesn't matter to her father or me—if she would only realize it! But we can't even talk to her about it. She's destroying herself with a delusion! She thinks David will come back. All she will do is sit and wait and watch the beach, and someday, she thinks, she'll see him. Oh, Lieutenant, it's been a nightmare until she found you."

"You're giving me too much credit, Mrs. Copping. In time any kind of grief—" He broke off, suddenly remembering the nightmare fury of his own.

"No, Lieutenant. Fleur's pretending you're David, of course, and she's in love with you." She held up her hand in a gesture very much like Fleur's. "Let me finish. I'm not asking anything from you, Lieutenant, but patience and kindness. With your help she can make this transition. After she learns to separate you, as a man, from her delusion of David, she'll have her feet on solid ground again."

"In the meantime, suppose I'm in love with her?"

"But you know the truth about Fleur. Would any man want a—a madwoman?"

"Maybe we all suffer from our own individual forms of madness. Fleur's is just more obvious—and less damaging to other people." His jaw hardened as a wisp of speculation sharpened

into the clarity of fact. It began with a question that had nagged at his mind while she was talking—how often did motor launches suddenly blow up without cause?

The answer was obvious—they didn't. It was probable Mrs. Copping was telling him the truth as she knew it. Then she and Fleur were Copping's victims just as Butch had been. For Copping's security, no sacrifice was too great—if it were made by someone else.

"How many of the people on the bay own boats?" he asked abruptly.

"Why, most of us."

"What about the house down the road?"

"Mr. Fairfax has three Chris Crafts and—but I don't understand, Lieutenant. What difference does it make? We were talking about Fleur."

He hesitated—but then he became aware of the warm straightforward honesty of her personality. It seemed ridiculous not to trust her. This, at least, was real—she couldn't be shamming.

"I think there may be another boating accident coming up," he said.

She clenched her fist against her lips. "*No!* Once before I began to wonder if—no, David wasn't murdered, Lieutenant. Why? Who would — what point . . . ?"

"If you'll help me it won't happen again."

"What do you want me to do?"

"How well do you know the Fairfaxes?"

"We've been friends for years."

"Fine. Could you prevail on Mr. Fairfax to bring one of his cruisers up here. I'd meet him out by the jetty. It may be difficult, at this hour of the night. But if you could think of some excuse—"

"I'll tell him it's an emergency, that one of the children is ill. I'll say you're going to the Freeport Hospital to get Dr. Summers. But will you tell me why you—"

"When I'm sure." She might have been honest, she might have suspected David Hunter had been murdered but could Sessions ask her to believe—on his word alone—that her husband was the kingpin in a drug syndicate? Her own kind of loyal honesty made that impossible.

She tried to smile at him. But there were tears in her eyes and, he thought, a vague kind of comprehension, which terrified her. She was telephoning Fairfax as he slipped out of the house.

He went beyond the wall and sat on the same high dune where he had once stood looking into the estate. A rising wind had scattered the mist and the air was clearer. Grotesque shadows slid

across the sand as high clouds raced over the face of the moon. Rolling waves splashed up on the beach as breakers beyond the inlet lashed in storm fury at the protected water of the bay.

Sessions shivered, pulling his robe around him, for beneath he still wore only his bathing trunks. And the wind was cold with the salt taste of an approaching storm. He watched anxiously for the Fairfax launch. Concealed, lashed to the jetty, that boat would be Sessions' ace in the hole. The unimaginative duplication of one murder wouldn't be quite as simple as Copping assumed.

Sessions was sure he could reconstruct what had happened before. As a guest at the hacienda David Hunter, a naval lieutenant, had become understandably suspicious when he saw Copping taking a cruiser through the inlet for a lonely midnight cruise—particularly when Copping pretended that arthritis held him chairbound. Hunter had been indiscreet enough to let Copping discover his suspicion.

Copping had then arranged a situation that would tempt Hunter to follow him in a second boat—which had been wired with an explosive, timed to blow up when Hunter was approaching the inlet. The *Borrasca Eagle* had mentioned the survivor's heroic efforts to rescue Hunter. Far from heroic, Copping had been diving to recover the mechanism of the bomb in the event that the shattered cruiser was later washed ashore.

Sessions understood too what Copping had done in the cruiser that night. He had merely duplicated the same device for murder. Later on Sessions would somehow be induced to follow Copping across the bay and there would be another unfortunate accident.

But if Sessions followed in the Fairfax boat Copping's whole plot fell apart. Copping would be alone and at Sessions' mercy.

This was what he wanted—and yet he felt uneasy. What he must do would certainly destroy his romance with Fleur. More than that, it might wreck Fleur herself. She was slowly crawling back from the fringe of insanity. And this might—probably would—push her deeper into the abyss with no possibility of recovery.

Sessions realized something else—the trail he had followed did not end at the hacienda. It moved out to the ship at sea, from there to the hidden plantation where the drug was grown and processed. Copping was not the source of the evil—nor were the growers or the cringing hulks who peddled it.

The trail moved outward from them all, through dirt and degredation, back finally to the society that permitted the traffic to exist—to Sessions himself, to Mom,

Dad, the people who lived next door. They had all helped to create the insecurity, the instability, which Butch and those like him were trying to escape.

This was no evil that Sessions could destroy by a simple act of murder.

VI

Sessions heard the sputter of a motor and ran down to the shore. Fairfax handed over his cruiser without question. He tied it in the lee of the jetty and went back to the house. He sat in darkness at his bedroom window, watching the dock and waiting indecisively for Copping's next move.

There was a knock on the door. "May I come in, Mel?"

It was Fleur. He opened the door and reached for the light but she caught his hand. "I would rather it be just as it is, Mel. Your voice is different, you see. I'm sure you're you then."

They sat on the chair before the window. Fleur perched on the arm, sliding her small hand around his neck.

"I was an idiot tonight, Mel. But I didn't lose my head—not entirely. I knew it wasn't Dave on the beach. Before, I've always thought he was coming back. But —David is dead." Her fragile body shook. "He's dead! I can say it now. I didn't see him. There was no one there. Just a shadow."

"No, Fleur. Your mind wasn't playing you tricks. A man was on the beach."

"Don't pretend any more, Mel."

"It's true. I—"

"I'm finished with pretense! It doesn't give me a way out, either. I don't want dreams. I want you—flesh and blood reality." She laughed a little. "You know, I'm proposing—and I'm not giving you much of a chance to say no."

"I don't want it." He took her gently and drew her down into his arms. She relaxed, curling against his chest. But after a moment she pulled away and looked into his eyes.

"We're through with pretending, Mel. Even that story I made up the first night—about your coming from the veteran's hospital across the bay. Who are you, Mel, really?"

"Does it matter?"

"I suppose not—as long as it's fairly honest."

"And if it isn't?"

"Then you did come to rob us! I'll have to get used to being a —what is it they're called in stories?—a moll. And when they send you up I'll wait faithfully at the old hideout." She laughed again with childish delight. "That story's cornier than my own."

"The truth might be worse." After a long pause he added expressionlessly, "I might have

come here to kill your father."

"Oh, Mel, don't joke! I think you have to be a little mad, like me, to make up a convincing delusion." She repeated, her voice suddenly dull, "Like me. You don't want me, Mel—a psychopath, with complexes and melancholia!"

He took her in his arms again. "We're all tarred with the same brush, Fleur. We play with the same kind of delusions." He stood up, looking out of the window—and when he spoke it was rapidly, breathlessly, without feeling. "I'm not a lieutenant. My name isn't Ellings. I'm Stan Sessions, sergeant on furlough. I came to Punta de Borrasca to—"

"Stan—I like that—Stanley. And I won't forget either—not again."

"Wait! Listen to the rest of it!"

"No. I don't care why you're here. If it's your reason it's right. I know that because I know you. I'll always believe it. It's odd, Stan. When you've been so close to madness as I have you seem to understand other people so much better. You don't really want to tell me now. When you do I'll listen. It doesn't affect you and me. We begin tonight, not yesterday or some other hour in your past or mine."

When she had returned to her room and he was alone again he rationalized a strange hope out of what she had said. She believed in him. Therefore he could lay his own ghost without hurting her. He did not have to make a choice between Butch and Fleur. He could satisfy them both.

Two hours later he was dozing at the window when he heard a voice in the room below his. Oddly the French doors stood open again and the voice carried distinctly,

". . . going out now to pick up the stuff. I'll make deliveries the usual way tomorrow . . . Yes! . . . The girl saw me and had one of her scenes. I couldn't get away any earlier. Everything's under control. Don't worry about it."

Sessions heard the telephone banged down in its cradle. Seconds later Copping limped quickly across the terrace toward the dock. Sessions' mind was still fogged with sleep and he responded instinctively. Copping was actually going out to get the drug—this was precisely the situation he wanted.

He flung off his robe and sprang down the balcony steps. He made no effort at stealth. Somewhere a window opened but he did not look back. The motor of a cruiser roared loudly and the sleek little ship nosed out into the bay.

It was only as Sessions ran across the beach toward the jetty that his mind cleared of sleep.

He realized then that there had been no telephone call. Notice of the arrival of the drugs came in the Mexican newspaper and in no other way. The call, the loud voice, the open door—they were the stimuli calculated to entice him into the second cruiser, rigged with the explosive.

Sessions splashed through the water and climbed into the Fairfax launch. The wind was brisk and the bay was crested with white caps, but the moon was still bright and across its path he saw Copping's cruiser, heading toward the inlet.

Sessions raced the motor. The launch moved slowly past the point of the jetty, rocking in the choppy sea. Over the scream of the wind he heard Fleur calling him from the beach.

"Stan! Come *back!"*

His cruiser slid into the trough of a wave, rocking dangerously. When he was able to look back again Fleur was pushing the second cruiser out of the shelter.

"No!" he cried frantically. "Don't touch it!"

She shook her head and pulled the craft up beside the dock so she could climb behind the wheel. "I'm coming too, Stan. I know what . . ." The wind rose, and the rest was lost.

He glanced for a moment at Copping's boat, gleaming in a moonlit foam of spray. If he went after Copping Fleur would be killed as David had been. For one awful instant Sessions wondered if that wasn't a kind of blind justice. Copping killed indiscriminately. Butch was merely the byproduct of a profitable enterprise. Why not let Copping murder his own daughter in the same kind of blindness?

But his insanity passed quickly. Sessions had to make the choice, after all, between Copping and Fleur, love or revenge. Without hesitation, he drove the launch up on the beach and sprang through the shallow water, dragging Fleur out of the seat just as her motor roared.

"It happened like this with David. Just like this, Stan!"

He held her in his arms, wet and shivering, while the wind roared above them and the waves splashed up on the sand. But the driving mist was sharp and clean. Sessions had a sense of being washed clear of the filth he had followed for so long.

Fleur's pilotless cruiser, its propeller churning, slid out from the dock, circling wildly as it gathered speed. The steering mechanism locked as the boat darted toward the open sea. In the distance Copping's cruiser circled and headed for the inlet to lure the second boat after it. But Copping was pursued only by a phantom.

In a volcano of foam the cruiser exploded. Sessions saw Copping's craft once again, briefly. He had gone too far. The

boat was trapped in the giant breakers at the mouth of the inlet. Sessions saw a tiny dark figure desperately fighting the wheel. And that was all . . .

Hand in hand Fleur and Sessions walked back to the hacienda. Harry Copping met them in the living-room.

Harry Copping!

And then Sessions understood the truth.

Fleur and he were in Punta de Borrasca the day the body was found. They bought a copy of the *Borrasca Eagle,* and stood scanning the headlines.

"I came to murder a man," Sessions said slowly, "but I found a princess and a paradox. Because of what you were like I had to eliminate the Copping family. And the time element involved automatically ruled out the servants."

"You forgot the man who was not quite either."

"I overlooked Jack Grange. So blank and characterless—as inhuman as a typewriter."

She nodded understandingly.

"Father called it efficiency. You see, George is Father's first cousin on his mother's side. It's natural to give a close relative considerable freedom in your home if you've no reason to suspect him, and George had a certain beguiling charm and persuasiveness. Incredible as it may seem, father was completely taken in. There's a side to George you didn't have an opportunity to see."

"Grange's very efficiency should have given him away. Any guest at the hacienda was always a potential threat to him. I became actively so when he heard me asking your father about the Mexican newspaper. By that time he must have heard that someone was wreaking minor havoc in the lower echelons of his organization—it was easy enough for him to put two and two together.

"He tried to kill me that night at my motel—and missed. After I moved to the hacienda he saw no reason why he shouldn't duplicate his previous murder. It had worked once—it would again. That's *real* efficiency for you, Fleur! Unfortunately I had a kind of fixation on your father. Grange realized that, so he helped along my illusion by limping, as your father might, when he went outside. My hatred made me blind. I had to have revenge and it warped my thinking."

Fleur's hand stole into his. "Mine was a kind of madness of love," she said. "Yours, Stan —well, you told me once that we all play around with dreams and delusions. You've cured yourself of yours too." She stood on tiptoe, so she could reach his lips.

"You and I should have fascinating children, Stan. Think of all their wonderful compulsions

and complexes. Not an adjusted kid in the litter!"

He laughed as he kissed her. "They're going to be just as normal as any other children and you know it."

"Of course I do." She stood on tiptoe again.

STATEMENT REQUIRED BY THE ACT OF AUGUST 24, 1912, AS AMENDED BY THE ACTS OF MARCH 3, 1933, AND JULY 2, 1946 (Title 39, United States Code, Section 233) SHOWING THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, AND CIRCULATION OF THE SAINT DETECTIVE MAGAZINE, published monthly at New York, N. Y., for October 1, 1954.

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King-Size Publications, Inc., 471 Park Avenue, New York 22, N. Y.
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5. The average number of copies of each issue of this publication sold or distributed, through the mails or otherwise, to paid subscribers during the 12 months preceding the date shown above was: (This information is required from daily, weekly, semiweekly, and triweekly newspapers only.)

H. L. HERBERT, President.

(Seal)

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 27th day of August, 1954.

WALTER S. COOPER, Notary Public,

State of New York, Qualified in New York County, No. 31-5811250, Cert. filed in N. Y. Co. Clks. & Term Expires March 30, 1956.

a pair of scissors

by . . . Geoffrey North

He was a gambler to his agile fingertips. But when Death sets the stakes the odds are high.

I GUESS YOU know Paradise Beach, the all-year play spot where the vacationing big shots from Hollywood and Broadway hang out. I had a chess-playing concession there, taking on all comers for a fee. It was an ideal set-up, combining business with pleasure. Best of all, there was Marie.

You can have those standardized pretty girls as flavorless as wax fruit, and welcome. I'll take charm, character and a sense of humor. Marie had all of that, and she was running a golf-driving cubicle on the pier next to my chess layout.

When the professional chess-player meets the usual amateur it's about as much fun as shooting fish in a tub. But with this tall, hawk-nosed fellow who sauntered up to my board one cloudless June morning it was a different matter.

"My name's Gann," he said, "I like to play for big dough."

"Five dollars a game?" I said.

"That's about my speed," he said.

He attacked, I counter-attack-

"Ruby, ruby, who has the ruby?" This is one of those widely exciting tales of pursuit, counter-pursuit and elusive, turnabout mystery at which Geoffrey North is so ingeniously expert. He displays here an extraordinary understanding of an extraordinary character's psychology and technique.

ed. He parried, and I was in a loss. I won the next one. Then, two draws later Gann said we'd double the stakes. I won. Gann shook my hand, and paid me ten dollars.

"Had a swell time," he said, and headed off, grinning.

From then on, not a day passed without a battle royal between us. We played spectacular games for high stakes. Gann's losses didn't seem to faze him, and we drew the crowds.

Besides myself, Tony, the silhouette artist, made a good living out of the set-up. He was a tiny old blind man who wore dark glasses, and a sign dangling from his neck:

PROFILE PORTRAITS
BY BLIND TONY
50¢

On each side of the lettering were pasted silhouette heads of celebrities, cut out of black paper: Tony's testimonials, samples of his artistry.

He worked among the kibitzers around my table. "Permit me to pass my fingers over your face, sir," he would say, and he'd begin exploring the man's features with his thin, sensitive hands. Then, snip, snip quickly, and, "There you are, sir, your portrait." Unusual character, if I do say so.

One morning, arriving at my stand, I found the place deserted. But across the Midway, a crowd had gathered in front of Talbot's window. I went over, just out of curiosity.

Talbot's is one of the great jewelry houses of the world. But they don't do business in the dignified manner of Tiffany or Cartier. They believe in blowing their horn good and loud.

Inside the window were two red stones, the size of hazelnuts. They were identical in shape, color and brilliance and they nestled side by side, against a white background. The poster underneath them read:

GUESS WHICH RUBY IS
WORTH $50,000?

One of the rubies displayed here is the famous "Blood of The Balkans," specially priced by Talbot's at only $50,000. The other is a Talbot Replica: You can have it for $50. Either gem is an exceptional buy. We solicit your inspection without obligation.

During the previous three months, whenever business had needed a shot in the arm, Talbot's had found some new way to ballyhoo the "Blood of the Balkans." Talbot's were flamboyant, but no firm had a better reputation. If they said a stone was worth fifty grand, that's exactly what it was worth.

I started back to my stand. Crossing the curb, I passed blind Tony, sunning himself on a camp-stool. On his lap was a

big tin cup containing a pair of scissors, paper, and a few coins.

"How's everything, old-timer?" I inquired.

Tony's face lighted up with a smile when he recognized my voice. "How's the champ?"

"Did you cut any masterpieces today?" I asked.

"I did a few good ones," he said. "Some day, maybe soon, I'll really cut you something you won't want to part with."

"I'm heading for my table. Coming along?"

"Be with you later."

Back at my board, Marie swished by. "How's the brain today?"

"Functioning, angel."

Gann wasn't around, but soon I got tied up with a tough customer. The crowd swarmed in close. While I was figuring I heard the familiar tapping of a cane, and blind Tony, behind me, said: "Champ, let me cut your portrait. I want to show these gentlemen how it's done."

"Go ahead," I told him.

I didn't look up from the board. Tony's delicate fingers touched my face, then his lips were close to my ear, whispering, "I'm going to hide something inside your mouth. Go right on with what you're doing."

He put his thumb and fingers between my teeth, and something the size of a hazelnut slid under my tongue.

Tony stepped back. I kept the "hazelnut" under my tongue, my eyes on the board. Then I heard Tony snipping away with his scissors. A minute later, he slipped the silhouette in my pocket.

"Here's your portrait, Champ. Take a good look at it later. It's very exceptional."

I was still engrossed in the game and didn't look up. "Take care of that souvenir," Tony whispered, "until I call for it. Then, we'll share." I heard him go tapping away.

I waited until the chess game ended, and the crowd dwindled away before I took the mysterious object out of my mouth. It was one of the rubies I'd seen in Talbot's window.

I asked Marie to watch my spot, and started after Tony. One of his haunts was a bit of beach near the Gulf House, and I headed for it on the run.

At Surf Avenue, where the boardwalk bends, there was a short cut, underneath a bath house that stood on raised piles. I started through the sandy cut, wildly asking myself: "How did Tony get that stone, and what did he mean by, 'We'll share'?"

Then I saw Tony lying there with his face buried in the sand, and one arm curled around a pile post. The other stretched out in a puddle of red.

I knelt, ripped open his shirt, and listened to his heart. I didn't hear anything. The bullet-hole was in the back of the neck. I

could see where the powder had burned through the cloth—a close-up shot.

As I ran back to the boardwalk to look for the Law, I tripped over something. It was Tony's cane.

A few minutes later I was telling Detective Fred Wend how I'd found the body. I said nothing about the ruby Tony had given me. Wend relayed my story by phone to the coroner's office before starting back with me to look at the body.

"We'll stay here with Tony until the doctor comes," said Wend, raking me with his slatey, cynical eyes.

"I didn't touch anything, sergeant," I assured him.

"Nobody suspected you did."

After a while a bull-necked man with grizzled hair, carrying a black bag, came up, and took over. We carried Tony into the bath-house office, and the doctor rolled up his sleeves, and went to work. In a few minutes he straightened, staring hard at me.

"He's been dead about a half an hour, I'd say. The bullet angled up into the brain. A close-up shot." He continued to stare at me. "What's your story?"

So I told him what I'd told Wend. I never mentioned the ruby I was carrying. The doctor shrugged, and turned to the detective.

"You take it from here," he said.

Wend said to me, "I've heard your version twice, but it still doesn't add up."

"What's wrong with it?"

"Why did you leave your stand at the busiest hour of the day?"

"I got hungry."

"The eating spots are all on the other side of the boardwalk from where you stumbled on Tony," he reminded me.

"There's that clam-house near here," I said quickly.

Wend glanced at his watch. "It doesn't open until four."

"Well, I made a mistake. You don't think I killed Tony?"

Wend laughed sourly, turned to the doctor and asked him if it would be okay to go through Tony's clothes. The doctor nodded. Desperately I tried to think of some way to divert the clothes-searching routine. A crazy idea angled into my brain.

"Doctor, did you examine Tony's eyes? I don't think he was really blind."

The doc looked at me sharply for a moment. Then he removed the dark glasses from Tony's face, fished out a light from his bag and became painstakingly professional again.

Wend sparked the cigarettes, and we burned them down until the doctor finished.

"Champ, you were right! There was never a thing wrong with Tony's eyes! The old faker

certainly put one over on us all these years."

"It begins to make sense," said Wend. "He would never have assumed such a disguise if he wasn't mixed up in something crooked."

I didn't believe at all that Tony was a crook. But I chimed in, "You're right, sergeant. He was probably a lookout man for a gang of crooks!"

Wend turned a friendly face to me. "That's good thinking. Can you tie it up with anything specific?"

I nodded. "Yes. As I passed Talbot's this morning I saw Tony sitting a few feet from the window where the rubies were displayed."

Wend didn't say anything. He simply swung about and walked to the back office where the phone was located. He was gone fifteen minutes. When he came back, he said to me:

"Somebody stole the 'Blood of the Balkans,' the stone which was worth fifty grand. The old switch act. Talbot's didn't even know about it until I suggested they examine their window."

The doctor told us we'd both be needed at the inquest, and went out. Wend said affably, "Champ, you're in the wrong racket. You should be a detective." He gave me a friendly slap on the back. "I suppose you'll be turning up with the stone yourself, one of these days."

"I'll let you know when I do."

Wend said he'd pick me up at my stand later, and we parted. I headed for the place where they rented lockers, put the "Blood of the Balkans" under lock and key, and concealed the key in my shoe. I knew Talbot's would be offering a reward for the stone, and I didn't want anybody else gumming up the works.

When I got back to my stand, there was a customer waiting for me. It was Gann.

He started at me with a new variation. I sacrificed, and had the better in the middle game. The crowd edged close. Pressed hard, Gann studied the board intently. Waiting for his move, I kept thinking about Tony and the Talbot ruby.

Suddenly, Tony's role in the strange business flashed into perspective, becoming as clear to me as the win waiting for me on the board.

Carelessly, I transposed a move, and in a wild melee all the pieces were exchanged. We'd drifted into a dull ending. The kibitzers, bored, moved off. We were alone, except for Marie next door, polishing away at a mashie.

A shaft of sunlight came slanting across my eyes. I couldn't see Gann's face, but something hard was poking into my ribs under the table.

"Stay where you are," whispered Gann, "until I tell you

to get up. Keep on with the game, understand?"

I moved the king out of check. "What's the idea?"

"Do as I tell you and I won't shoot. You're too good a chess-player to kill. All I want is the ruby."

I interposed the queen. The gun kept shoving into my ribs. "Are we staying here until we finish the game?" I said.

"No. Listen carefully, and don't double-cross me."

"I'm listening."

"When I take my king off the board, stand up. Then we'll walk together to the boardwalk opposite. There's a blue 'Chevy' parked there, and you'll climb in with me at the wheel."

"When you take the king off the board," I said.

The light stopped hitting me, and I saw Gann's face clearly. I waited until his eyes flickered toward the Midway, then came up fast with my knee, turned the table on him, leaped over, and started grappling with him.

I heard the gun go off. Gann tripped me, but I was on top when we fell. Marie hurdled in through the gate, screaming, swinging a golf stick. As she came on, Gann snaked a hand around her ankle. She fell, then jumped up fast with the gun in her hand, and hurled it far out over the railing into the water.

We rolled up, and I hit Gann under the jaw hard enough to split my knuckles. He countered with a blow back of my ear that turned me around. Then I saw Wend come leaping over the gate.

"Break it up!" he shouted. "What's the idea?"

Gann started brushing his clothes, a sheepish look on his face. He turned to Wend. "It was nothing, really. We just had an argument over a chess game."

"That's a lie, Sergeant!" I said. "Gann, here, is your killer. He's the man that shot Tony!"

"What's he talking about?" demanded Gann. "The champ's crazy!" He turned to me, "Brother, that game must have upset you badly."

"Sergeant, that man had a gun," cried Marie, pointing to Gann. "I saw it."

"She's as crazy as he is!" Gann laughed. "Search me, officer. You won't find any gun on me."

"Of course not," said Marie. "I threw it in the ocean!"

"What a great helper you are, sister," said Wend.

"Sergeant, let's save time," I said. "Take us all over to Talbot's. I'll explain everything there."

"Explain what?" said Wend.

"Why Tony was killed. Why Gann here killed him, and where the missing ruby is."

So we all trailed across the boardwalk toward Talbot's. When we passed the locker house where I'd stashed the ruby, I

retrieved my prize and rejoined the others.

When Talbot came in, that made five of us, and the little office was crowded. The pudgy jeweler had eyes like dried-out plum pits. When he recognized Wend he asked: "Well, sir, whose party is this?"

Wend nodded at me. "Champ here is going to tell us who stole 'The Blood of the Balkans.'"

Marie settled down in the one chair while Gann hiked himself to the white, marble-top desk, and calmly lit a cigarette.

"Well, Champ," said Talbot, "let's have it."

"To begin with," I said, "here it is," and placed the ruby on the desk.

Talbot took a lens from his pocket, picked up the stone and examined it. "So it is, my friend. The 'Blood of the Balkans.' And how did you come by it?"

"It was given to me by Tony."

"And why did he give it to you?"

"For safe-keeping."

"Just when was that?"

"About fifteen minutes before he was murdered."

Talbot made a long, rumbling noise in his throat like a frog croaking. Nobody else said a word. They all just looked at me dead-pan. It was a bad start.

Talbot kept rubbing the ruby between his soft, white palms. "Go on, Champ."

"That man sitting there on the desk is the thief and killer," I said.

Gann shook his head, and said quietly, "From the admissions you've just made, the killer's role fits you better."

"Yes, it would seem to fit you exactly," said Talbot.

"Let me finish my story," I pleaded. "Mr. Talbot, did this man come into your store today and look at the stones?"

"I'll answer that," cried Gann. "I did."

Talbot held up his hand. "It proves nothing at all." He turned to Gann. "You looked at the stones, and so did twenty-five others, I remember you, particularly, because ten minutes after you'd inspected the rubies, you came back for your purse which you'd left on the counter."

"Now everything's clear," I said. "It all fits together."

Wend said to Gann, "We'll first have a look at your purse."

Smiling, Gann took out his wallet and threw it on a desk. Wend picked up the billfold, opened it and flipped through the wad of greenbacks. I counted over fifteen hundred dollars.

Wend gave the purse back, then took out a pair of scissors, and placed them on the desk. "This was Tony's," he explained. "We picked it up near where we found the body. That should take care of all the clues. You've still got the floor, Champ."

I went on: "Gann went into Talbot's this morning, carrying the substitute stone, which he'd long prepared. He made some small purchase at the gem counter and then asked to see the big stone. It took him only an instant to switch stones and leave the store.

"But some time later, he discovered that he'd left his purse on the counter at Talbot's. He had no choice but to return for it. He couldn't afford to lose the money. Besides, his failure to return would surely have cast suspicion on him.

"But it was a risk. It was possible that the substitution had already been discovered and that they would search him when he went back.

"Gann thought of all this as he neared the store, and when he saw Tony, the supposed blind man, a brilliant idea struck him. He placed the ruby in Tony's tin cup. Alms for a beggar. He couldn't afford to hesitate. He had to gamble that the stone would be safe there until he returned for it. Then he went back to Talbot's and retrieved his purse."

"This, I gather, is all conjecture on your part," Talbot said. "Have you witnesses to any of the events you've described?"

"You've proved nothing whatever," said Gann.

"Let him finish his whole story before you object," insisted Wend.

I continued: "Tony, of course, wasn't blind and he realized what Gann had put in the cup. He quickly sized up the situation, figuring there'd be a reward offered for the return of the ruby to its rightful owner."

I looked at Talbot. He stared back at me coldly.

"But Tony didn't want to go to the police, or anybody else with his story," I said. "He did not want to disclose the fact that he'd been imposing on the public all these years. So he came to me, trusting I'd keep his secret. While he was cutting my portrait at my stand, he slipped the ruby inside my mouth. He figured I'd return it, collect the reward and split it with him."

I looked around. On all the men's faces I saw only utter disbelief. Marie's eyes were worried. "Finish it up," said Wend.

"Of course, when I first discovered the ruby under my tongue I wondered what it was all about, and ran after Tony to find out. That's how I stumbled on the body."

"But you held out on the stone," said Wend. "Go on."

"I put the stone in a locker and went back to my stand, where Gann was waiting for me. Gann must have seen Tony leaving my spot, followed him, and killed him. Not finding the ruby on him, he shrewdly guessed that

Tony had turned it over to me. So Gann covered me with his gun, and that's how the fight started."

"Yes, I saw the gun!" cried Marie, "and joined in to help the Champ. The gun went off and I threw it in the water." She jumped up, face flushed. "Now all you have to do is to retrieve it, and compare the barrel markings with the bullet that killed Tony. The gun will prove that Gann is the killer!"

"That doesn't follow at all," said Gann, sliding off the desk, and grabbing Wend's arm. "Fish that gun from the water, and if it's the one that killed Tony, I don't know and I don't care. You see, that gun doesn't belong to me. And that's not all—"

"He's a damned liar!" I cried.

"You've had your turn, Champ. Now suppose you let Gann go ahead," said Wend.

"Here's my story," said Gann. "Champ here is the one who stole the ruby—working alone or with a confederate. Tony, too, was in on the deal. He was the look-out. Tony was killed for two reasons: First, the champ couldn't trust him; second, a dead man was needed to fit into his fantastic, lying yarn."

Talbot rubbed the lens between his white, soft palms. "Sergeant, I'll say just two things. Champ had possession of the ruby. And he withheld that information from you until long after the body was discovered. I leave it to you, how does that add up?"

"Champ, you'll have to come to headquarters," said Wend. "Your own words make you the logical suspect. I'll have to throw the whole book at you."

"But the gun!" I exclaimed. "He poked a gun at me under the table at my stand!"

"Oh, no," cried Gann. "That's not true! The champ provoked the quarrel, upset the board, and when we fell there was a gun on the floor. But it wasn't my gun."

I stood there, and I was whipped. All of my tactics had boomeranged. *They* stood there —three men with holier-than-thou grins on their smug faces.

"Come along, Champ," said Wend.

"But he couldn't have killed Tony!" cried Marie. "He loved Tony like a brother!"

I stood there praying for a miracle, my hand deep inside my pocket, feeling the crinkle of paper, the cut-out silhouette Tony had put there, my portrait, his last handiwork.

"Something exceptional," he'd said.

My hand came out with the black cut-out, and the instant I saw what Tony had done my heart leaped up to my throat.

It wasn't *my* face Tony had outlined with his scissors, but Gann's hawk-nosed profile. And

below the head, he'd snipped out something that looked like a fancy scroll. So I smoothed the portrait out on the white, marble desk-top.

"Look at this," I said. "You'll see that Tony had the last word!"

They all crowded around. "It's Gann to the life!"

And they saw the fancy scissors-work below Gann's face, the snipped-out message from dead Tony: "This man put the ruby in my cup."

"Tony only intended to warn me by this," I said. "But now he accuses—"

Gann made a grab for the silhouette. I knocked his right hand away, but his left swept up the scissors. Swiftly he darted behind Marie's chair, thrusting the blade against her neck.

"I'm moving back, moving out," he said. "The girl's my shield. If anyone tries to stop me I'll stick the blades in her."

Talbot twisted his wrist a fraction, and the light from his lens jumped across Gann's eyes. Marie ducked and I dived—head-on into Gann's midriff. As we tumbled Wend already had the handcuffs ready.

So there we were at last—Marie and myself alone with Talbot. In the pudgy jeweler's eyes was a strange, dreamy look.

"Extraordinary," he said. "A duel between a gun and a pair of scissors! What an idea for a window display after I assemble all the props! I could head it, 'The Duel at Paradise Beach.'" He moved briskly to the desk and began writing.

Suddenly his eyes were hard and bright. "I'm afraid," he said, "I'd only insult you, Champ, if I offered you a reward for having done your duty."

I looked at Marie, and my jaw sagged. "But, of course," he went or quickly "there's the far from negligible matter of your equipment which was damaged when you had that fracas with Gann." He passed across the slip of paper he'd been writing on. "I trust this will recompense you for your loss."

Marie moved close and I looked at the check. "Three grand!" I exclaimed.

"However," said Talbot, "if it's too much, you could easily find somebody to share it," and one smiling eye started a fast flutter.

I crushed the paper into Marie's hand. "What do you say to that, Marie?" I asked.

"Oh, yes, Jim. Share and share alike, for as long as you want me."

Talbot went out to the boardwalk with us, and shook our hands ceremoniously. "By the way, Champ," he said. "I'm curious. What sort of a chess game does Gann play?"

"Just what you'd expect from a killer," I told him. "*Murderous.*"

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mr. tuttle takes a trip

by . . . Edwin Baird

A vacation is for fun. But Tuttle settled for spine-tingling terror.

MR. TUTTLE LOOKED at the travel folder and put a check with his pencil beside Wilderness Lodge.

That was where he would like to go, Wilderness Lodge. Green forest, limpid lakes, babbling brooks . . . But of course he wouldn't go. Of course he would spend his vacation this year just as he spent it every year, right here in Chicago. And the travel folder would continue to mock him.

He sat in his booth, staring through the open door of the railroad station, watching, but not really seeing the passing traffic in the street outside. There was a faraway look in his faded blue eyes as though he were looking beyond the city street at some distant green horizon . . .

He really ought to get away from the city this year. Do him a world of good. Here he was almost sixty and he hadn't been out of the city in seventeen years. Maybe if he snitched a bit from his savings . . . No! Mustn't touch that! That was for his old age, when he could no longer sell tickets . .

Three decades ago in Chicago, Edwin Baird, as editor, gave wise counsel and encouragement to more now famous mystery story writers than there are blackbirds in a pie. We should also like to point out that Mr. Baird can do a fine writing job too—you won't be in a hurry to forget Mr. Tuttle.

A man stopped in front of the ticket window.

"Yes, sir," said Mr. Tuttle. "What can I do for you?"

"You can sell me a railroad ticket." He was a pale young man, and his hand trembled as he placed a small traveling bag on the counter. "I want to go to some quiet spot where I can be alone," he said, his underlip twitching nervously. "Do you know of such a place, not too far away?"

"I know exactly the place," Mr. Tuttle said, and spread the vacation folder before him. "Wilderness Lodge. Green woods. Limpid lakes. Babbling—"

"All right, all right," the young man broke in, and jerked a billfold from his pocket, "How much?"

"Twenty-six dollars," said Mr. Tuttle, a little disconcerted.

The young man plopped a fifty dollar bill on the counter. Mr. Tuttle took the bill and turned to get the ticket. When he turned back to the window, with the ticket and twenty-four dollars change in his hand, the bag was still there but the young man was gone.

Mr. Tuttle saw him running through the crowd, going toward the street, with two beefy men pursuing him. Then, as he watched, the young man dashed into the street, stumbled, and fell in front of an onrushing taxicab. He saw the cab bumper crack against the man's head, saw the blood gush forth from the crushed skull . . .

Again Mr. Tuttle heard a voice; this time the voice of his youthful co-worker coming on duty. "Well, Mr. Tuttle, all set for your vacation? Going away this year?"

The crowd had shut out the horrible scene in the street.

Mr. Tuttle slid his trembling hand into his coat pocket. "Yes," he said, and licked his dry lips. "Yes, I'm going away this year."

"Don't go too far, Mr. Tuttle."

There was a derisive note in the young fellow's voice and it provoked Mr. Tuttle into doing a thing that, in a saner moment, he would never have dreamed of doing. He got his hat, then picked up the small black bag left by the young man lying out there in the street.

"I'll see you in two weeks," he said, and left the ticket booth.

A few minutes later he sat in the moving train, with the young man's bag beside him and considered for the first time this thing he was doing. He was scared. But he was pleasurably excited too.

Well, he had done it and he might as well make the best of it. The twenty-four dollars, plus what little money he already had, should see him through. And everything else he needed, he'd

probably find in the black bag.

He opened the bag and looked inside. There was a newspaper on top. He moved the paper aside —and his hand jerked back as if he'd touched something hot . . .

The bag well filled with money!

He closed it quickly, glanced about the coach. Nobody was watching him. After a moment he opened it again. The money was in neat little bales, sealed with paper tape marked Second National Bank. Each bale was rubber-stamped $500.

He snapped shut the bag, his heart violently palpitating.

At Minneapolis he bought a paper from a newsboy who boarded the train. There it was on the front page.

Chicago Bank Teller
Absconds With $50,000.
Killed By Taxicab.
Money Disappears.

Wilderness Lodge was a fashionable place, and for four days Mr. Tuttle enjoyed himself fully. Then his money was gone and his mental anguish began. He was afraid to spend the money in the bag.

He slept with it in his bed, when he slept at all. Mostly, he didn't sleep. He would doze fitfully, then awake with a start to make sure the bag was still there. He ate his meals in his room so that he could watch it.

Finally he got rid of the bag. On his last night at the lodge he wrapped the fifty thousand dollars in brown paper, filled the bag with rocks and heaved it into Wilderness Lake.

Next morning, with the package of money under his arm, he started walking toward Chicago.

It took him nine days to make it. He earned food by washing dishes at road-side restaurants. Once he got a lift for a day's ride with a truck driver.

At dawn on the ninth day, looking more faded and frailer than ever, he climbed the three flights of steps to his room, still carrying the fifty thousand dollars.

It was two miles downtown from where he lived. He walked it, went straight to the Second National Bank. To the guard at the door, he said, "Where is the president's office?"

"Over there." The guard pointed. "He hasn't come in yet."

Mr. Tuttle crossed the marble-floored lobby to the president's office. The door stood open. In the center of the office was a big desk. Mr. Tuttle walked in, put the fifty thousand dollars on the desk. Then he walked out.

Early next morning he was back on the job. His young co-worker said, the same derisive note in his voice, "Well, Mr. Tuttle, have a nice trip?"

"A *very* nice trip," said Mr. Tuttle, smiling at the boy, not minding his derisiveness at all.

—Continued from back cover

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